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# THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY
*And*
ALEXANDER VAN RENSSELAER

By ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY

TURNS ABOUT TOWN

MEN AND BOOKS AND CITIES

BROOME STREET STRAWS

WALKING-STICK PAPERS

PEEPS AT PEOPLE

BOOTH TARKINGTON

THE MEMOIR TO:
JOYCE KILMER: POEMS, ESSAYS AND LETTERS

*In Collaboration with*

ALEXANDER VAN RENSSELAER

THE BUSINESS OF WRITING:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR AUTHORS

# THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

## *A Practical Guide for Authors*

BY

ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY

*And*

ALEXANDER VAN RENSSELAER

NEW YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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*George H. Doran Company*

*The Business of Writing. I*

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*Printed in the United States of America.*

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TO

THE MANY ACCOMPLISHED WRITERS

WHO, NAMELESS TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC,
ACHIEVE SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS
WITHOUT FAME OR APPLAUSE

THIS BOOK
IS DEDICATED BY
THE AUTHORS

3063905

# THE STORY OF THIS BOOK
## A PREFACE

A MAN who for some considerable time had been contributing regularly each month an article to "The Bookman" under the pseudonym of "Murray Hill" chanced one afternoon to drop into the office of a friend of his who, in the course of his business, happened to be looking over a pile of letters from persons aspiring to write for publication. His friend, with a smile, handed him one of the letters to read.

As he read it, he was inclined to amusement by its extreme naïveté. He read more of the letters and his sense of amusement grew. Then the thought occurred to him that once on a time he himself, very likely, would have been quite capable of writing letters equally as simple in heart as some of these. And he saw in his mind a little picture of himself long ago—long before his years of experience in editorial offices, remote from any such mythical personages as editors, writers and publishers, but consumed with an unreasoning desire to write. His amusement

faded. Perhaps, he felt a little fullness in his throat. What a hard and roundabout route he had come since then! If he could at that time, when he was so eager, have known but a little of what he now knew, how many sad mistakes might he not have avoided. And, indeed, how differently it all might have been with him today!

He read on. And his feeling changed to one of amazement at realizing what a great number of people there are in the world trying to write but with no more than the faintest or most garbled notion of the business of writing for publication.

His friend had seemingly read his thoughts, for as he looked up his friend remarked: "There's a chance to do some good 'missionary work'—in writing an article about such letters as these. It ought to clear up a good deal of misunderstanding in the minds of beginner-writers who might read it. And I should think, too, that editors and publishers might be glad to see some such educational matter broadcasted."

The article was written, and was duly paid for by the magazine. But the primary object in its preparation was an attempt at rendering a little first aid to persons seeking their way to placing

manuscripts. And the author of the article had got a new idea—he might even become of some help to others in the world. He decided to write a second article on another aspect of the same subject. And he went to his friend, who had before given him so much material, for further help.

In this way the articles in the magazine began to grow into a definite series. Somewhere in the evolution of the thing, John Farrar, Editor of "The Bookman," came into the plot, as a guiding hand of much value in the scheme to promote among writers unfamiliar with them practical understanding of present-day conditions in the publishing world.

The first several articles were signed "Murray Hill." Then the management of the magazine switched to the real name of the man who had employed that literary alias. Maybe because it was felt to be more mellifluous. Or perhaps for the purpose of identifying them with one more or less known to have been engaged in editorial affairs for some time.

Though the articles were becoming more and more a work of collaboration, the one name was held to, for this reason: The series had begun

over the signature "Murray Hill." Then one Robert Cortes Holliday turned up as responsible for them. Now to introduce into the matter a third name, Alexander T. M. Van Rensselaer, might bewilder the readers as to who was writing these articles anyway. Probably, they might have thought, pretty soon you'll see there the name of still someone else. And, also, the Van Rensselaer and-all-the-rest of it name is so long that it makes a queer typographical effect at the top of a magazine page.

A couple of the articles were the work altogether of one of the authors. A couple, the work altogether of the other. "The New Bookshops," for instance, is quite obviously a bit of work by one hand. Though this chapter is not directly in line with the general character of the others it is included as a presentation of a most interesting present-day development in marketing literary wares.

As the series proceeded in the magazine numerous letters came in concerning the subject. A curious thing about many of these letters is that, after referring to one of the articles, they asked one or another of the identical questions which that articles had set out to answer. Or they

suggested that there should have been included in some one of the articles points which had there been given precise attention.

Some of the letters presented very interesting commentary. One of these, discussing the article "Why Be An Author?", said:

> But my main reason for writing to you now is to comment upon that statement of your friend: "Once an innocent amateur author has shown a story of his to a friend or relative, he is lost." Now I do not believe you could discover a more striking and important illustration of the difference between the American and English temperaments than this. In England the innocent amateur author who shows his work to a friend or relative is lost indeed. He is lost in gales of derisive laughter, in veiled innuendoes ("Send it to 'Punch' old chap! 'Punch' will take anything: nobody reads it!"), in sarcastic allusions to spoiling good paper, to long hair and velvet coats. He will be chided for bumptiousness ("Hello, Rudyard Kipling, Junior. How go the verses? Yah!"). His sister will snicker and josh him. His friends will ask him what name he writes under. His mother will worry no end.

And some of the letters expressed a friendly hope that the series, when finished in the magazine, would be made into a "handbook for authors."

The story of how this little volume came about illustrates somewhat its purpose. But perhaps a word or two more would not be amiss.

Naturally, when anyone comes across a book of this sort, or of any other sort, the thing he wants to know is: "What's the good of it?" That is, what is there in it that may be of service to him? And, also, are there things which he is seeking that are not in it?

The reason for this Preface is that the authors want at once, as their publisher is fond of saying, "to put all their cards on the table."

One thing they desire to say right off is that there is no attempt in these pages to "teach" anyone how to *write* anything. They, the authors, are not professors—bogus or authentic. Their business has been, in the main, in editorial offices. It is a fairly legitimate business, as things go, but certainly not particularly academic.

Another thing, you may read this book through and never sell a poem. The volume reveals no system for beating the game.

Further, the authors have not regarded their own knowledge of the matters considered as a body of wisdom analogous to the stone tablets of the law. Their concern has been to assemble

the facts from all available sources. They have frequently endeavored to give equal weight to opposing ideas concerning editing and publishing.

Now, the total absence from this book of any Aladdin's-lamp-like efficacy makes it peculiar in its field. But, after all, its sad limitations may be its merits. Its authors have felt a very strong "inhibition" as to attempting to perform the unperformable.

What does the book attempt?

To give an intimate and friendly view of what actually goes on in editorial offices of various kinds. To dissipate widespread misconceptions of the business of authorship. To explain some of the reasons why successful writers are successful writers and why unsuccessful writers fail. To offer the writer unacquainted with such matters elementary counsel in his business dealings. To furnish a miscellaneous variety of information that may be helpful to anyone not in direct contact with the literary "market." To eschew pendantry. To strive for simplicity of style. And to seek to maintain complete honesty in its attitude toward its readers. . . .

"A task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy."

The authors are decidedly conscious of their responsibility. The book has not been written for the purpose of general encouragement toward a career of authorship. The book is not meant to be discouraging. In fact, it is offered, for one thing, as an incentive to introspection. This book has sought to ask: "Do you, upon closer acquaintance with the matter, take the career of a writer for better or for worse?" And to say: "Do not (as many an one has done) wed in haste the Muse of letters and repent at leisure."

One of the strange customs of the publishing business is to include in certain volumes bibliographies that, to the average reader, are just about as unintelligible and useless as the Table of Contents in a book that has no chapter headings. The bibliography in this volume has been designed, not with the idea of simply acquainting the reader with the titles and the names of the authors of a number of books relating to the subject under discussion, but primarily for the purpose of helping the reader to select from the great mass of books published a few that may serve him best and be of the greatest interest to him. To

this end a sentence or two has been written under each title, giving some idea of the field covered by each of the books listed, except in such cases where the title seems to be self-explanatory, as for example "The Art and the Business of Story Writing," by Walter B. Pitkin, which is obviously a study of the art and business of story writing.

In the preparation of this book many persons have been interviewed and numerous sources have been consulted. The authors gratefully express their appreciation of all the valuable assistance obtained. Especially they desire to thank Frederick C. Melcher, Esquire, Managing Editor of "The Publishers' Weekly," and Miss Luise M. Sillcox, Executive Secretary of The Authors' League of America. The work as it progressed in serial publication profited materially from the generously given suggestions, criticisms, and encouragement of William McFee, Esquire. Acknowledgment should be made of the fact that in the gathering of the material for Chapters VI and VIII a complete file of "The Bulletin" of the Authors' League of America, from its first issue of May, 1913, has been freely drawn upon for information. Though in the mat-

ter of arguments of a controversial nature expressed therein, the position of the chapter has been held neutral.

R. C. H.
A. V. R.

*New York,* 1922

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# THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

# THE BUSINESS OF WRITING

## I

### APPROACHING THE MODERN EDITOR

MUCH of what is said here may sound to you very elementary. Such matters are mentioned because many very elementary things in the writing business are apparently quite unknown to large numbers of people who are trying to make their way into a writing career.

Here's a perennial illustration of this fact: About November first every year multitudes of novice writers apparently sit down and turn out Christmas stories. The Christmas numbers of most monthly magazines, everybody knows, are published around the middle of November. And you'd think that anybody would know that anything that goes into them would have to be written not much later than August, even when it had been arranged for in advance and the author

did not face the possibility of loss of considerable time in having to submit his story first one place then another.

So we'll venture to begin at the very beginning. You have manuscripts to sell. There are several ways of going about the matter. (1) Through a literary agent. (2) Submitting directly by mail. (3) Through personal friends of the editor. (4) By calling upon the editor. Also, a good deal that appears in magazines is written on assignment.

The functions, advantages and limitations of the literary agent will be discussed in a later chapter.

§ *Editorial Routine.*

Suppose you submit your manuscript directly by mail. What happens to it? It is received and listed or entered; that is, it is probably given a number; this together with the name of the author and the title of the manuscript is recorded in a ledger; and the manuscript is placed in a safe or cabinet to await its turn to be read. It is more than likely that there are a good many other manuscripts ahead of it in this safe or cabinet. In the entry book of one of our best known

monthly magazines the manuscripts recorded as received in one day not infrequently number as many as seventy-odd. The lowest number of manuscripts listed as received on any day is seldom less than twenty-something.

Next step in editorial routine: your manuscript goes to a reader. He (or she) may spend two minutes on it, maybe even less time. If this first reader regards the manuscript as flatly impossible it is (provided return postage has been enclosed with it) sent back to the author at once. If the manuscript is bulky and you want it returned express collect, you should so state in a note accompanying it when it is submitted. It is advisable, in order to engage at once the good will of the reader, for manuscripts to be neat in appearance. On the other hand, experience and observation lead one to believe that publishers' readers are inclined to feel something of a prejudice toward manuscripts that are got up in anything like a fancy way.

§ *Report of Readers.*

If your manuscript holds this first reader to the end it is (in some offices) passed on to another reader, or several other readers. It is then likely

to go to the editor himself, with a report on it reading something like this:

January 9, 1922.

THE HAILSTONE

*By John M. Headpiece*

This is cleverly done with a surprise at the climax. We might consider it if you'd care to use a MS. of the type of "Twins." Artificial but interesting. After a violent summer storm a New Yorker cuts out of a paper an article about hailstones large enough to kill a man should one of them hit one, and takes it to his club, where, at lunch with other members, he comments on it. One of the party denies the truth of this and tells a story to prove his point. I don't think he does prove it, but the story he tells is ingenious.

It is obviously impossible for the editor of a widely circulated magazine to read all the manuscripts that are submitted to his publication. On the other hand, as he is responsible for everything that he publishes, he must make the final selection from the available manuscripts. It is the reader's job to separate the available from those that are unquestionably not available, and his report tells the editor three important things: (1) something about the subject and plot of the story; (2) the outstanding feature of the story; (3) in what manner the author has handled his material.

In the case of "The Hailstone," the reader decided that the manuscript was available, because: (1) the subject was odd and interesting and the plot ingenious; (2) the outstanding feature was the surprise at the climax; and (3) although artificial the story was interesting and cleverly done.

The editor may decide from this report, without reading the manuscript, that this is not the kind of story that at the moment he wants. Or he may read the story and not agree with the opinion of his reader as to its cleverness. Or he may read the story and decide to take it.

The procedure just outlined is that which usually prevails in editorial offices. There is this, however, to be said about magazines: All kinds of shops may be said to be in the shop business. All magazines certainly are in the magazine business. But in their policies, practices, and requirements magazines are frequently as different one from another as a lingerie shop is different from a cigar store. There are magazines where this system of handling manuscripts is practically reversed; where the editor himself looks first at everything that comes in; weeds out the hopeless at a glance; and employs his readers mainly in

checking up his own judgments of manuscripts which he has under consideration. In a few magazine offices a lawyer goes over every accepted manuscript to make sure that it contains nothing libellous.

Do not expect or demand an immediate decision on your manuscript. Some editors take a week, some six months—which is about the limit. Publishers assume no responsibility for the safety of manuscripts in their hands; keep a carbon copy of everything that you send out.

§ *Know Just What You Are Doing.*

Send your manuscripts to those magazines only which you know to be reliable—there are some magazines that do not bother to return rejected manuscripts; there are others that do not pay for accepted material. Handle your manuscripts on a sound business basis—a business man would not send goods on consignment to a stranger without credit. If you *want* to send a manuscript to the "Piebald Monthly," at Hohockum, Iowa, why of course all right; but first know just what you are doing.

Do not send manuscripts to a magazine until you have a fair idea of the kind of thing that

magazine uses. A note something like this turns up every once in a while in a publishing office: "This is the first fiction story I have ever finished up and made a definite effort to sell. I have submitted it to 'Metropolitan' and 'Everybody's,' for which I realize myself it is totally unfitted."

What a confusion of objectives is revealed in another letter! It begins: "I enclose herewith an article entitled 'The Unknown Soldier.' I have sent it to 'The Atlantic Monthly,' 'Judge,' 'The Ladies' Home Journal,' all of which publications have declined to accept it." And the practice of innumerable "budding authors" and "new beginners" seems to be to send whatever they have, no matter what its nature, first to "The Saturday Evening Post."

There are a number of publications, both periodicals and bound volumes, which may be found of service in acquainting one's self with the names and addresses, the character and the needs of American magazines. The way recommended by the editors of most of the leading magazines for a study of the "market" is to regard attentively the magazines themselves. One point in particular, which should be obvious enough, but which editors frequently are wont to complain of,

is that new writers so little note the length of the contributions used in their periodicals. Don't send a seven thousand word manuscript to a magazine in which you have never seen anything over twenty-five hundred words long.

Don't continue to send out a manuscript in which you have totally lost faith. From the note of a young author upon receiving his rejected story: "I have written and copied it so often that I am perfectly disgusted with it and can see no good thing in it. I have such beautiful ideas and when I begin on the mechanical part of writing or typing, I find that it is not at all what I want it to be." Well, though, of course, every artist feels something of that.

§ *Futile Letters Harmful.*

Don't send futile letters to editors. This kind of thing: "I do not believe that I overestimate myself when I say that I know I have unusual ideas along fiction lines."

It accomplishes nothing for the author of a manuscript to tell an editor, as some novices do: "I have been told often that I was born to write." It does not impress the editor overmuch to hear that: "After reading some of my work one of

my school teachers years ago was or seemed to be very much enthused over it, and was sure I could enter without any trouble the world of literary work which I have always wanted so much to do."

Letters like the following sometimes slip by the mail clerk but never get beyond the editor's private secretary:

> I am what is known as a "budding" author, and I need some pruning and care. The rejection slips I am accumulating are like early frosts—they blight the fruit. What I need is a little of the sunshine of success.

And so on. Simply tell 'em (if you want to) that you have had (if you have had) work published in such places, that you are willing (if you are willing) to cut the manuscript any amount, what (if you are going away for a while) your address will be during the next couple of months or so. Such things. And enclose this information *with* the manuscript to which it refers. A letter telling about a manuscript must accompany the manuscript if it is to make any impression upon the editor.

A tendency very prevalent among writers beginning to seek admission to the magazines is that

of referring, in a letter to the editor, to some well-known person as a friend of theirs: "Mr. John Farrar, editor of 'The Bookman,' has urged me to send this manuscript to you." Usually the case is that Mr. Farrar (say) has no acquaintance at all with the person using his name; he may merely have said in rejecting that person's article that it was better suited to a magazine of more general character than "The Bookman." So this dodge is without effect, unless perhaps it inclines the editor to take a rather slighting view of the character of the writer who employs it.

§ *Introductory Letters Unnecessary.*

Some occult power evidently is attributed by innumerable beginner writers to letters of introduction from eminent persons. Such letters are continually being sought by strategy, and more than occasionally by blunt demand. As a rule, perfunctory letters of introduction are without any efficacy. Indeed, they may even work the wrong way. An important man at first friendly to the young writer may be annoyed at being held up by him for such a letter; and the editor to whom it goes may feel annoyance toward the bearer of the letter for attempting to run in

under his guard in such a way. This, of course, is not at all to say that when the use of a well-known name, or a letter of introduction from one of established reputation, is *volunteered,* this is not a good office to the unknown writer. But it won't sell a manuscript—where that manuscript does not intrinsically belong.

§ *Personal Interview Sometimes a Boomerang.*

No idea, probably, is more firmly entrenched in the mind of the "struggling" young writer than the notion that if only he (or she) can, by some hook or crook, break in to see the editor himself face to face, everything will be all right. It is not impossible that sometimes the neophyte writer may gain something by a personal interview. But what does not seem to occur at all to those endeavoring to launch themselves as writers, is that there is considerable danger, too, in confronting an editor in person; ardent souls are very apt to overdo the matter; it may be much better to stay away.

Editors have, more often than now and then, become disinclined to a manuscript by hearing the author talk overmuch about it; and the more he has talked the deeper has grown the editor's

prejudice against the manuscript. And—would you believe it?—there are those who, having contrived to get an editor alone, put such faith in feminine wiles. It is folly to fancy that one can vamp one's way into success in literature. *The destiny of a manuscript by a writer without established reputation is in black marks on white paper.*

After a writer has become something of a regular contributor to a magazine the situation is quite different. Many editors have a keen desire to know their contributors personally, all of them. But even then there is a hazard for the writer. There is a story about this, a classic in editorial offices. A magazine editor known to everybody had been receiving through the mail a succession of highly impassioned poems. Flaming they were; stunning, in their way. He used them. Wanted more. He felt that he must see the author. Asked her if she would not call. When, at the hour of the appointment, she was announced, he rather nervously adjusted his tie, straightened the body of his coat. Considerably keyed up, he was. Then, was ushered in a little anaemic creature of an age sufficient to be his

aunt. He lost his taste for the lady's poems. Perhaps the story is a fable.

The method of writing by assignment has been alluded to in a foregoing paragraph. Professional writers whose work is readily marketable usually sell their articles before they are written. This is done in various ways. Magazine editors frequently solicit from well-known writers articles on subjects which they have made their special field. When Joyce Kilmer was killed in France "The Bookman" petitioned Richard Le Gallienne for an article about him. Mr. Le Gallienne's name was an appropriate one, he had been a personal friend of Kilmer's, and his sympathies, the editor knew, were thoroughly engaged. In course of no long time unsolicited articles about Kilmer came into "The Bookman" office by the score. A number of them were very good. But matters like this are almost always arranged at once.

§ *Selling MSS. Before Writing Them.*

In advance of some notable event to occur, it is, of course, the general practice of editors to arrange with some writer to "cover" that event. A writer is selected whose style is in conformity

with the character of the magazine in which the article is to appear. Any one of the innumerable unsolicited articles about America's "Unknown Soldier" which turned up in magazine offices after the ceremony at Arlington had less than a small chance of being taken anywhere.

Frequently writers of standing go to an editor with whom they have had dealings and say: "Such and such a thing is going to come about. I'd like to do this for you." The editor may reply: "No; we're fed up with militarism. Don't want any more about training camps." Or he may say: "Fine; go ahead. About thirty-five hundred words. Copy by the fifteenth, sure. I think you'd better treat this more from a serious than from a humorous angle. Make it as informative as possible."

A procedure much in practice is this: A writer whose work is generally known makes a list of perhaps half a dozen ideas for articles he would like to write. He puts down a brief outline of each idea, something like this:

HINTS FOR SELLING MANUSCRIPTS

Ways of going about the matter. Literary agents. Directly by mail. Interview with editor. Editorial routine. Study of market. Different types of maga-

zines. Editors as human beings. Rejection slips, and how to know them. Specific reasons for rejection. Outstanding faults of novice writers.

He sends this list to an editor, usually to the editor of a magazine for which he has been writing. Though he may send it, or take it, to the editor of some magazine that he simply wants to get into.

The editor probably recognizes at once certain articles that he doesn't want. He doesn't want this, say, because he already has in hand the manuscript of another article dealing with very much the same idea. He doesn't want that for the reason that he feels the subject has been done to death. He doesn't want the other as it is not in accord with the policy of his magazine; his appeal, perhaps, is to more unsophisticated readers than this article would reach. Another idea, maybe, would make an article of local rather than national interest. These items of the writer's list he checks with a "No."

But the editor, we'll say, finds on this list a couple of suggestions for articles which he would like to have. Opposite these he marks "O. K." That is a definite order. And the writer does not

put in a week or two, or maybe more time, on work which may avail him nothing.

Is it feasible for an unknown or little-known writer to pursue this method with editors? Extracts from letters giving the opinions of some editors on the subject follow. These quotations are taken from an enquiry into the matter made by Frank MacCarthy, published in the July, 1921, number of "The Writer's Monthly":

> We are always willing to receive suggestions from our readers in connection with the subjects of articles and their treatment and to indicate whether or not such treatment, as outlined, is likely to be available for use in "The Post." We are not able to speak with more certainty than this in regard to manuscripts. Except in rare instances it is useless to query us in regard to short stories, so much depending upon the development of the idea.—*The editor of "The Saturday Evening Post."*
>
> My personal, though not official, opinion as the outcome of my experience as an editor, is that there is usually, under present conditions in the magazine field, no advantage to be gained by an unknown or little-known author by asking the editor whether he would care to see a certain kind of material. . . . It is rare that an unknown or little-known writer can attract the attention of an editor by any preliminary description of what he

intends to write. Such questions put to an editor usually somehow tend to prejudice him against the author's work, and it is conceivable that he might turn down material which, if he were confronted with the completed stuff, he might be interested in. I know that this is unreasonable and illogical, but it is a pragmatic fact about editors, and it is not altogether their fault.—*V. Jordan, associate editor of "Everybody's Magazine."*

I think it is a very sensible thing to question an editor as to the suitability of a certain subject for his magazine. It saves both the author's and the editor's time. . . . Of course, you understand that an affirmative answer to a query is not necessarily followed by acceptance of the finished product. Everything depends on the way the subject is handled. It may be something particularly suited to a certain magazine, but the writer may get the wrong slant, suppressing the points he should emphasize and vice versa. I would, therefore, urge the writer when he gets a favorable answer to his query to closely study the make-up of the magazine he is writing for.—*John M. Siddal of "The American Magazine."*

§ *Completed MSS. Interest Editors More Than Queries or Synopses.*

Don't pester editors by writing in such questions as: Do you use poetry? or, Do you use certain kinds of articles? or, Have you room for a

serial? Please go to a newsstand, or a library, and find out. As for the serial, so much depends on the serial.

Some editors suggest that in the case of a writer whose work is little known it might be well, if he writes to ask an editor to consider a suggestion for an article, for him to accompany his letter with an article already written, as a specimen of his style. On the whole, however, it is very probably much the wiser way for a little-known writer to send in the completed stuff, except perhaps on rare occasions when he feels pretty sure that he has an idea of considerable and immediate news value. Writing in telling editors about articles he'd like to write is so easy that he is likely to wear out an editor's patience with him, and never get a show.

Never send in to an editor a synopsis of a story. It will only exasperate him. Nothing is more hopeless than for a little-known writer to expect an editor to form any conception of what his story will be from a synopsis of it.

§ *Study Magazine Individuality.*

A word should be said about how *not* to study the magazines. Don't study them with your nose

too close to the pages. If you make a classified list of periodicals you get some such group of headings as: Fashions; Home Building and Furnishing; Children's Publications; All Fiction; Literary Publications; Amusements, Sports and Travel; News Feature Journals; Humorous Publications; For Women; For Men; and so on. Of course, you can go on and refine such a general classification. The point of view of one type of "literary" journal, for instance, may be discernible as decidedly more aesthetic than that of another type. A manuscript sent to the "Broom" might ring the bell, that sent to "The Bookman" would miss fire. And the other way about,—the field of one magazine, of course, very frequently overlaps the field of another. An article with a literary subject might be quite suitable to a humorous publication.

There is this to be considered: magazines, weekly publications usually, devoted mainly or altogether to current happenings, to news, use very little that comes in to them unsolicited; almost all of their contents are the product of assignments. Though certainly any novel and timely article that might crop up in the mail, if it were well done, appropriate to the character of

the magazine, and on a subject not already covered by the editor, would get attentive consideration.

§ *All-Star Magazines Cold to Unsolicited Contributions.*

Then one might add to his classified list a little group of all-star magazines. There are two classes of writers occupying quite opposite positions; unknown writers who are striving tooth and nail to get their work published, and writers of achieved popularity pursued continually by editors. You will find a few magazines made up altogether of "headliners." These magazines have little or no interest in what may come in to them from obscure writers. They "go out after" the work of the writers they want. Asked the other day about what proportion of the material he was using came to him unsought, the editor of one of these magazines replied, "None at all."

§ *Everything Does Not Depend Upon a "Name."*

The idea frequently encountered among unknown writers, however, that there is everything in a "name," is a fallacy. The editor of one of the best of our monthly magazines told not long

ago that but a short time before he had in one week returned articles by Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw, George Moore, and other highly distinguished writers. He had used instead work of freshness, of charm, or of power by writers with their careers nearly all before them. An intense interest in new writers is the attitude of plenty of magazine editors. "New writers are the life of the magazine business," declared an editor the other day, the editor of one of the most widely circulated substantial magazines in the country. A few minutes later, in another office, the editor of another of our leading magazines said: "New writers are the hope of the whole situation."

Which way the wind blows in the several matters that have just been discussed, is what is to be got from a study of the magazines by the new writer. He most certainly should not sit down and try to imitate slavishly any distinctive tricks that he may find. The editor of a very vivacious and popular magazine recently remarked that he was sometimes appalled by the evidence of the harm that apparently his publication had done to novice writers. Many, it seems, in their earnest endeavor to write something that will be his kind of thing, grotesquely parody the style of that

periodical and, of course, so squelch any innate gift that may be their own.

The young writer should study his rejection slips closely, and take to heart every suggestion he is lucky enough to receive from an editor. So anxious are editors to discover and cultivate talent that, when they receive a manuscript of extraordinary promise, they will go out of their way to encourage the author.

In such cases the manuscript will not be returned with the usual: "We have read your story with keen interest and regret to say that, although it is not without merit, we cannot accept it for publication at the present time."

But it will be sent back with a helpful letter: "It seems to us that you really have a feeling for and understanding of boys of the boarding school age and the sort of life they actually lead in school and out of it, but we do not consider that your story contains sufficiently consistent, well developed plot to make a successful juvenile. The individual episodes are often well presented, but the story as a whole is not knit together with sufficient closeness to hold the juvenile public."

Here is real encouragement and valuable information. Yet many a young author is bitterly

disappointed by just such criticism, and immediately runs to his personal friends with both the letter and the story. "Do you think this criticism is justified?" he asks. And his friends, desiring to remain friends, and, incidentally, knowing very little if anything about the "juvenile public" and what will hold it, emphatically reply: "No, indeed! The editors are simply trying to save their faces. They don't want your story, because you haven't a big name like Ralph Henry Barbour, or somethin', and they're afraid to tell you so." Take the praise of relatives, friends, and others not in the writing business with a handful of salt.

Nobody, of course, can give you a skeleton key that will open editorial doors. All that can be done is to attempt to reflect something of the atmosphere and the talk of editorial offices.

## II

### APPROACHING THE MODERN PUBLISHER

IN the preceding chapter of this book the subject dealt with was the situation between the beginner writer and the magazines. The article was designed to give information concerning the placing by the young author of manuscripts of a length suitable for publication in periodicals: short stories, novelettes, essays, or poems. A number of things remain to be considered about the handling of manuscripts of book length. And some of the suggestions that were presented regarding dealing with magazine editors would not apply at all in the matter of approaching book publishers.

So few people outside of the publishing field, it seems, understand in the least the problems or the machinery of book publishing that, as in the preceding chapter, it will be well to consider much that is very elementary. Letters like this come into publishing houses every day: "I would like

to know what is the best I could do on a plainly bound volume without gilt adornments, about the size of the ordinary novel—or a shade smaller—with wide margins equally divided at top and bottom of pages, and printed on thick enough paper in large enough type to pad the story to sufficient size."

And another: "It was my idea to send copies of it to newspapers at times publishing reviews of books; hoping in that way to attract favorable criticism, that would enable me to secure for it attention from the public, then willing to produce it on shares."

§ *Most Books Published on a Royalty Basis.*

The way in which most books are published is on the basis of a royalty paid to the author on each copy sold, the publisher assuming all cost of manufacture and marketing of the volume, and accepting all risk in the enterprise. It is the custom generally for royalties to be paid twice a year. Very popular authors can command a greater royalty than others. A higher royalty is paid on fiction than on non-fiction. A very usual royalty is ten per cent. on the first two thousand copies sold, and fifteen per cent. thereafter. On

some types of book, poetry for instance, less is frequently paid. Many authors, particularly "budding" ones, seem to labor under the false belief that if they offer their book free of charge a publisher will accept it when otherwise he would reject it. No reputable publishing house will publish a book without first agreeing to pay the author something for his work. Dishonest publishers will rarely take a manuscript unless the author pays them something in advance. It is, therefore, of no avail to tell a publisher, as so many do, that you are not interested in the financial side of the undertaking, and that the publisher, if he will only publish your book, may keep for himself all that he can make from the sale of the book.

A book manuscript submitted to a publishing house goes through very much the same sort of editorial routine that a shorter manuscript does when sent to a magazine. It is received, title and name of author entered in a record book, it is given a number, placed in a safe or cabinet, and in its turn receives a reading. A card or form letter acknowledging its receipt usually is at once sent to the author. Publishing houses do not assume responsibility for the safety of manu-

scripts in their possession. In some cases where a manuscript in the hands of a publishing house has been lost or destroyed the publishers have as a matter of courtesy paid the author an amount sufficient to cover the cost of retyping it. Though manuscripts in the care of publishers are very rarely lost or destroyed, curious accidents do sometimes happen to them. There was an instance where a manuscript taken home by a reader over night was chewed up by a dog. An author should never fail to retain a copy of his work.

There are still persons here and there ambitious to become writers who submit manuscripts in long hand. Such a manuscript carries a very heavy handicap in receiving interested consideration. When the material submitted is printed matter which has previously appeared in newspapers and magazines it is well to have it neatly pasted on to manuscript paper, and not rolled into a wad with little or no head or tail to it.

§ *Submitting Book Length Manuscripts.*

In submitting book length manuscripts it is a good plan for the author to send a letter with the manuscript, stating *briefly* who he is and of what

books already published, if any, he is the author. If the manuscript deals with, say, "child science," and the author is a woman who (though she may not have published anything) has been long active in such work and a successful lecturer on the subject, it would be pertinent for her to tell that, succinctly. But it is not good policy, to put it so, for the author to say anything with flowers.

A synopsis accompanying the manuscript is sometimes a great convenience to the publishers' readers, but it may be a dangerous thing, too. If it is not skilfully and interestingly written, it may prejudice the reader at the very start. And good synopses of book length manuscripts are very difficult to write.

In the preceding chapter the practice was discussed of professional writers sending in to magazine editors brief outlines or synopses of articles which they proposed to write. Some magazine editors, a few, it was reported, felt that this procedure might be employed now and then, with advantage to both author and editor, by writers not of established reputation. This plan, however, in the case of a new writer certainly is one of the most hopeless things in the world to attempt with a book publisher.

People continually do send into publishing houses letters designed to show that the peculiar circumstances of their lives present excellent material for books they would like to write. The writers of such letters ask if the house is interested in the volume they have in mind, and some of them apparently expect to come to "terms" at once. The author of one of these letters may have had a remarkably romantic career, been born among Indians, married a princess of the tribe, or something like that, but no literary adviser to a publishing house can form any idea of what sort of book he might make out of it. And a woman who has led one of the most ordinary existences imaginable may any day send into an editorial office the manuscript of one of the most successful books of the day.

§ *Manuscripts Read by Specialists.*

Several thousand unsolicited manuscripts of book length come into any large publishing house in the course of a year. Manuscripts of books of highly specialized character are usually, after a preliminary examination establishing a possibility of their value, sent to "outside readers" who are specialists in their various fields. A work on

psychology would go to a professional phychologist, very likely to several, if the first report on the book seemed to the editorial department to warrant this. That a highly valuable book on such a subject was in course of preparation, would, however, very likely have been known to a house having an educational list, and some negotiation would probably have preceded the arrival of the manuscript. The manuscript of a religious book would probably be passed on by a minister; a story for young girls might go to a librarian specializing in work with children. And so on.

In the preceding chapter the advice of numerous magazine editors was presented in the counsel to novice writers to study the different character of various magazines. What is one publication's meat is another's poison. And this is so, too, in a very considerable degree of publishing houses. A very good idea for the writer attempting to place his first book would be for him to collect and study the catalogs of different publishers. A bookseller will frequently say, upon hearing merely the title of a book which he does not readily place in his mind: "That sounds like a

Doran book," or "a Holt book," or "a Doubleday book," as the case may be.

§ *Publishers' Likes and Dislikes.*

Some houses, of course, publish more kinds of books than other houses. But a thing understood practically not at all outside of the book business is that a publishing house which is very successful with a list of books which it has made its own kind might, if it should accept such a volume, fail with a book of a type which it had been unaccustomed to handle. A remark heard every once in a while in publishing offices is: "Our salesmen wouldn't know how to sell that book."

The journey of a book manuscript after it has been received in a publishing office varies with the office. Usually it first goes to one of a little staff of readers, persons who either do nothing else but read manuscript or who combine manuscript reading with writing publicity notes and advertising copy about books already published or about to be published by the house. Such persons are generally college bred and sometimes themselves have a tendency toward writing books or articles or poetry. It is not unusual in a publishing house for one of the traveling salesmen

to be called upon every once in a while to give an opinion from his point of view of the advisability of accepting a manuscript. Occasionally a publisher's traveling man takes out to the buyer for a large book store, who is a good friend of his, a manuscript and asks for his judgment upon it. In some publishing houses, in the case of a manuscript of no distinctive literary qualities, the judgment of an "average mind," untainted by editorial sophistication, is sought; and the odd moments of intelligent young women secretaries and stenographers are employed in reading manuscript.

Doubtless every publishing house past the age of infancy has its awful family skeletons, darkly hinted at now and then as terrible warnings to its staff. Some of the most popular books within living memory have been turned down by very astute publishers, to go elsewhere to success; and some of the most gifted authors who later found high distinction.

§ *How Reports of Readers Are Considered.*

Still, in the press of business, one (frequently brief) report from a reader on its character must needs suffice for many a book manuscript.

Others draw maybe as many as half a dozen. In some large houses these reports are passed on by one man, the head of the editorial department, or, if the house has a magazine, the book editor. He may question the first reader's report on a manuscript, and send it out to another reader; or he may decide to reject the manuscript on the strength of that report. On the showing of a number of reports he may conclude to read the manuscript himself. On his own judgment of the manuscript he may reject it. Or he may advise the head of the house that the book be accepted.

In other publishing houses manuscript reports are taken up for final decision by a periodical gathering of various members of the firm, a cabinet or council meeting. In one house this tribunal is jocosely referred to by its members as "the Senate." In the case of the smaller and newer publishing houses the head of the house decides the matter, and is likely to do a considerable amount of his own manuscript reading. The heads of the larger houses, of course, have little time for looking at manuscripts, though now and then one of them examines something which he has cause to believe is of special concern to him.

In brief, the points considered by a first-rate publishing house in the decision concerning a manuscript are these: the suitability of the book to the list being prepared, the probability of its profitable publication, the probability of its making a striking success, the chance of its sale continuing for some time, whether the book would detract from the reputation of the house, or whether it would be an asset to the imprint of the house.

§ *Why Certain Manuscripts Are Accepted.*

A book of verse, say, may be taken mainly because the list is short on verse. A book of essays, perhaps, may be declined mainly for the reason that several volumes of essays are already in train for early publication. A book of solid character, a biography, suppose, promising no very great immediate sale but an enduring one, is frequently a better literary "property," in the publishing term, than a novel of fairly wide popularity whose day is quickly over. Very reputable publishing houses have not been averse to accepting books reasonably well assured of a wide sale when they have quite realized that such books were of a quality below the standard of houses of their

character. Several popular successes enable a publisher to carry on his list books much more creditable to his name but of limited sale. Now and again, publishers of very business-like mind have accepted books which they felt proud to publish but which they knew would hardly pay for themselves. There have been occasions when a new author has submitted two manuscripts at the same time, one of which the publisher saw possibilities in, without having any faith in the other nor any regard for it; and when the publisher has agreed to take both books to secure the one and to gain a hold on the author's future work. Instances are not rare, of course, where the success of one book has led a publisher to accept earlier and inferior work of the author. Writers rapidly coming forward sometimes are signed up by a publisher for several books ahead sight unseen. And cases are not infrequent where a publisher accepts one book and turns down the author's next. The ins and outs of publishing are a somewhat complicated business.

§ *Publishers' Rejection Slips Often Misleading.*

Book publishing houses have an even greater variety of rejection slips and form letters than

have the magazine editors, and inexperienced writers are likely to find them also more misleading. A form letter may be printed, or either multigraphed or typewritten. A printed rejection slip is not the unkindest sort of cut, as so many who receive them seem to feel. It generally says very much the same thing as a form letter either multigraphed or typewritten. These are frequently misinterpreted by the receivers as being personal letters. And their exceedingly courteous wording sometimes causes elation. They mean nothing at all. The sterotyped phrase "read with interest" is the same sort of formality as "Very truly yours."

Vogues pass. Established writers die. It is to the interest of a publishing house, very much to the interest of a publishing house, to cultivate the good will of the potential authors of consequence of tomorrow. A special letter, not quite a form letter, usually is prepared in rejecting a manuscript which in the editor's judgment shows promise of work of possibility for the house. In the case of a manuscript of decidedly exceptional interest to the editor, he writes a genuinely friendly letter to the author, generally stating just why the work was declined.

Some book editors are much more encouraging rejecters than others. They put into their letters phrases of approval quoted from the readers' reports; and sometimes explain to the author just what they think ought to be done to make the rejected manuscript acceptable—somewhere.

Sometimes the reasons given for the declining of a manuscript are rather startling to the rejected author. A very good house one time received a manuscript dealing with society life in England. The editor sent the manuscript to a reader. The reader in her report praised highly the style, the plot, and other qualities, but made the statement that the author's accounts of society life in London were inaccurate. Without further examination, the editor returned the manuscript to the author with a fatherly note of advice, urging him to write only about the things with which he was familiar and explaining that the returned novel showed that the author was quite ignorant of English social life. As a fact, the author happened to be an English gentleman, who had spent a large part of his life in London society, and who had lived less than a year in the United States. So you can't always sometimes tell

about editorial advice. Otherwise stated, accidents will happen in the best regulated families.

Manuscripts are repeatedly accepted with provisions. In the case of one of the most sensational of recent novels the author was required to delete certain portions of the manuscript, and to modify others. A highly successful mystery story of a couple of years ago was several times rearranged by the young author before it was completely satisfactory to the publishers. In its published form material which at first had stood well along in the story appeared as the opening chapter. And sometimes manuscripts are taken with the understanding that they are to be very rigorously edited in the publishing house.

§ *Some Reasons Why Manuscripts Are Rejected.*

True enough. One of the most prevalent errors going, however, among amateur writers, is the highly fallacious notion that faulty "technicalities" in a manuscript don't matter much if only you have good "ideas," "Oh, I don't think there's much in it, you know, if you only get a good idea," remarked one of the speakers in McFee's excellent satiric sketch "The Idea." It is remarkable the number of people aspiring

to write who are firm in the belief that they have splendid ideas but who are in a similar case with the man who sent along with his manuscript a letter telling the publishers to do to it whatever might be required in the way of grammar and punctuation, as he had "never been strong in clerical traits." In discussing rejected manuscripts, an editor observed the other day that certain defects in the work of young writers repeated themselves so often that it was quite possible to name some of the general outstanding faults. At the top of his list he put: "lack of training," "inability to give effective expression to thoughts and observations." Another editor, asked for his view of the trouble with most of the manuscripts that came to him, replied: "Defective craftsmanship."

§ *Many Books Sought by Publishers.*

Books are acquired by publishers in various ways. A young man achieves a name as a clever journalist and a popular following. First thing you know, a publisher seeks a book from him. A rumor arises that a statesman retired but the day before from the thick of things is writing an inside story of recent events. Several alert pub-

lishers look into this matter. A notable figure passes away. A distinguished writer associated with him throughout his career accepts a proposal to write his biography. An English novelist writes his American publisher that there is a young chap in London worth watching. A man who has made a considerable success with a book wants on his second book a greater advance against royalties than his first publishers are willing to pay; and is bid in elsewhere. And so on and so on. Not a large proportion of the books published are born of manuscripts which unheralded and unsolicited drift into editorial offices. But some of the most successful of books have turned up in that way.

When a book is accepted, or arranged for, a contract is drawn between the publishers and the author. The subject of contracts and copyrights and seeing a book through the press will be taken up later. A book is accepted, say, sometime early in the spring. It is "set," put into type, galleys are read by the advertising department, and a description of the book prepared for the fall catalog of the house. A jacket for the book is designed. A number of "dummies" are made. A dummy of a book consists of a specimen cover

of the volume enclosing a few of the opening pages printed as they will be in the finished volume, the rest of the pages blank paper.

§ *Selling the Published Book.*

Sometime during the summer the publisher's salesmen take the road. One covers the Pacific coast, another the middle west and the south, still another the smaller towns of New England—it is one of the larger publishing houses we are thinking of. Catalogs, dummies, and jackets of the forthcoming books are shown to the buyers of the book stores, and advance orders procured. Shortly before publication date another salesman rounds up New York and the other big cities of the East. All these salesmen have a pretty fair knowledge of the book, and are equipped with its "talking points."

Shortly before the date of publication paid advertising concerning the book is placed with magazines and newspapers. And the publicity department begins to send out to the book pages of the newspapers all over the country "literary notes" concerning the book and its author. On the date of publication somewhere probably between seventy-five and a hundred copies of the

book are distributed free. Most of these are "review copies" sent to literary editors. The others are given to persons of influence in the book world who may be inclined to aid the book, by saying something about it which could be effectively used in advertising, or by giving it "word of mouth advertising" themselves.

That is a brief sketch of the manner in which a book is published today. Publish, the dictionary says, means: to make known publicly, to issue, to put in circulation, to disseminate. And this outline we have just followed through of the career of a manuscript from the time it arrives in a publishing office until the time when it appears as a book on the market may give some little notion of the amount of capital that is tied up every time a manuscript is accepted—though nothing has been said of printers, proof readers, presses, binderies, stock rooms, accounting departments, and so on.

§ *Privately Published Books Unprofitable.*

A word is to be said about books that are not brought out in the ordinary way, on a royalty basis, books privately printed, and books the publication of which is partly paid for by the authors.

Books that are privately printed, of course, are not published at all, in the dictionary sense, because they have not behind them the elaborate machinery of an active publishing house. To have a book privately printed is generally more than anything else a practice calculated to minister to the vanity of the author; though now and then one comes across a privately printed volume of some value which perhaps could not have been brought out in any other way.

There remain to be considered what are known in the book trade as "author's books," volumes issued partly at the expense of their authors. Many people have an idea that this is not an honorable practice. Of course, there are a number of firms which make a business solely of encouraging the ignorant to let them "publish" their books. These firms ought to be run out of business. On the other hand, interesting and valuable books have been published at the expense of their authors simply because the sale of these books was obviously too limited to permit of their being published otherwise. It is said that one of the most popular authors in America today financed his first book.

There may be exceptional cases, but far and

away in the main the author in such a transaction is without further satisfaction than that of seeing his book in print. In "The Writer's Monthly" for July, 1921, was presented a mass of testimony which, with one exception, unanimously pointed to the conclusion that a transaction of this sort was in every way unprofitable to the publishee.

In conclusion, a word of emphasis on the value of the imprint of an established publishing house upon a book. By having an established and well-known house put out his book the author assures himself of some publicity, of a fair distribution of the book, and a certain amount of prestige.

# III

## THE FIELD OF THE LITERARY AGENT

HE nearly scared her to death, the young woman secretary who arose as he entered to receive him. He was such a spectacle as she had never before seen close up, and never in the respectable surroundings of a business office. In effect what is commonly described as an "old bum." His toes were sticking out. He hadn't shaved for perhaps a week. The dilapidated garment which he would have called his coat was several sizes too large for him. He informed the young woman that he had a manuscript which he had called to discuss. It was the office of a "literary agent."

The gentleman dealing in literature asked him the nature of his manuscript. He replied that it was "about feet." "About feet!" "Yes." He had never shown it before, he said; but he had been working at it for more than fifteen years. He tugged at one of the side pockets of his great

coat, and produced a huge wad of ancient, ragged, and grimy paper. This proved to be the most extraordinary work of literary intention this literary agent had ever seen. The singular author must have spent something like a lifetime at it. He had covered most exhaustively the subject of feet. He had ransacked Shakespeare, army orders, a bewildering variety of novels, apparently endless newspapers. He must have spent more hours in a library than ever did Leslie Stephen. And in his consuming passion for the fascinating subject of feet he had been more than utterly ruthless with a penknife. His voluminous manuscript was largely a vast array of clippings pasted up.

He wanted to know, this grotesque apparition, what the cost would be of typing his manuscript. About fifteen dollars was suggested as a reasonable sum for the work. Too much, he said; the manuscript would have to go back to his trunk, where it had been for five years. Well, what did he owe for the trouble he had given? He was told not anything. Oh, yes! he said; he always paid as he went. He put his hand deep down into his trouser pocket and brought forth a corpulent roll of bills, at the same time casting an

eye at the clock. He had taken up probably twenty minutes of time, he said, and he wanted to pay for it—people could not be in business for nothing. If nothing could be paid, then have some cigars. He took from that capacious mantle a large handful of cigars, laid them on the table, and made his adieu. There were all kinds of cigars you can think of.

§ *All Kinds of Authors Consult Agents.*

The writing "bug" is, indeed, a curious thing. The highly attractive and picturesque character who has just been depicted was obviously of the purest type of disinterested student. A much more frequent phenomenon is the simple soul with thoroughly utilitarian motive. There are apparently multitudes of those affecting beings who innocently consider that to write is to have "a fortune in your fingers." The other day a "literary adviser" to a prominent publishing house received in his morning batch of mail this letter:

I found your name in the Curier Journal of Louisville, Ky., and so I thought I would write you and see what you think of the proppotitian I have to offer. I believe I can

walk across the United States on my hands and feet in one year starting from the State of N. C. to Sanfrancisco, Calif. and never get up only for sleep at night—if you think there's iny thing to it just give me a hearing it can be done and I am fool enough to try it altho its a feat that will be well won if you are not interested give me the address of some magazine that you think would be. I was in the Army seven or eight years and I know what hard ships are I'l make the trip on my hands (and feet) (all fores) for so much and my expenses which will be small During that time.

So thanking you Gentlemen for your trouble I remain Your Respectfully

This letter was written from a small town in North Carolina. The "proppotitian" set forth presumably was that the house addressed should advance the amount that would be required for expenses by this gentleman during his expedition on all "fores" from N. C. to Calif., together with an additional "so much" in cash payment, and in return have the privilege of reaping the harvest from the publication of his account of the picturesque adventure. Though he does not mention that he is a writer, and possibly he assumed that the publishers would be glad to send along a man equipped with the faculty necessary for cov-

ering that minor part of the enterprise. His own highly colorful style, however, to judge from the sample submitted, one might regard as a peculiarly happy style for such a narrative. But this house was a rather conservative one, and so the novel idea had no business interest for the firm.

Written in pencil on paper carrying the letterhead of the American Red Cross, another letter:

From Prv. Peter M. Johnson,
A Natural Poet,
Just back from France.
Sir, As a "natural Poet" I has Wrote thousands of Poems. War and reconstruction-ones.
Sir, I am Willing to enter and agrement With You to that end.

Sincerely. Yours

This letter was received, some time ago, by the editor of an American magazine of literary character. The "end" sought to be arrived at by Prv. Johnson is not definitely presented, but the implication is fairly clear that he had expectations that the magazine would proceed to sign up with him as a star contributor.

§ *Demand for Vocabularies and "Whipping into Shape."*

One of the curious ideas firmly rooted in the minds of a large class of persons strongly tempted to "write" is that they have the fundamental qualities for the purpose but lack the superficial accomplishment needful for taking their material and "whipping it into shape." The following communication to a literary agent is a typical presentation of this fanciful conception of the affair of writing: "Will you kindly pass judgement on the enclosed and put it up in the proper shape for sale. I have a good many ideas but have neither the time to put stories into shape or the vocabulary to make them presentable."

Ho, that handsome word *vocabulary!* It always means something knowing, all right, if you don't know just what. There was once a man who owned a trade journal. He would occasionally place upon the editor's desk a number of little "editorials" (as he called them) which he had "written out." "Just run your vocabulary over these for the paper," he would say. Like a lawn mower, perhaps. To smarten up a bit the external look of things.

§ *Changing Story into Photoplay.*

Another curious thing. A great many people untutored in the elementary principles of creative production seem to have a pleasant notion that if you miss your aim in one form of endeavor all you have to do is to take another chance with your product at a different objective. Here are two letters written to a literary agent which well illustrate this simplicity of thought. One letter refers to the manuscript which it accompanied thus: "If it will not measure up to the technical demands of a short story then perhaps it may be used as a motion play production."

An esoteric thing like the "technical demands" of the performance to which he has applied himself is apparently a little matter which does not concern this writer. Indeed, *technique* is a word which you may often hear pronounced by those innocent of a knowledge of art with somewhat the same inflection employed by "practical" men when they say "theoretical." The other letter is without arrogance; it runs so: "find enclosed a MS. Please let me know what you think of it. If not fit for a Photoplay i would like for you to transfer it to a short story and want you to write

it over as if you yourself were going to submit it, i am just a new beginner and if you think that i could ever write i would take training. i have several other MS. trusting that you will take a consious interest."

One aspiring author sends along a worldly word of suggestion to the literary agent. Concerning his manuscript he advises this: "If the woman's magazines do not care for it, I should cut out the profanity and try it on the religious periodicals." A lady who has written what at first she describes as a "fairy drama" writes that "when you have read the play with a view to the composition of the music for it I think you will find it is what might be called a slightly heavy light opera." She had been working hard to get it done, "along with another rather heavy piece of work I have undertaken in the last two months, which is a 90,000 word novel." And "at present" she is engaged on "an historical drama," and also a "medieval drama." She concludes: "That is all the drama I have attempted to write. I did not begin to try to write anything until the First of Feb. this year so my experience is not very broad yet." A very conscientious author who seeks expert advice in a minor point writes:

"I am enclosing herewith a short story of about 1800 words, entitled 'A Scream.' Kindly notice on page 5, in the last line, whether I have spelt 'mumble peg' (the game boys play with a knife) correctly, and if not please correct. Thanking you."

A person of commendably cautious disposition who is not going to appear over-eager in the eyes of a strange bird such as a literary agent says: "I saw an ad in a magazine about the marketing of short stories, or something to that effect. This is of mild interest to me, so would like more detailed information."

§ *Functions of a Literary Agent.*

A considerable body of persons in their early seekings to place manuscripts have evidently hit upon the wild notion that the literary agent "stands in," so to say, with all magazine editors —that all they have to do is to get into his good graces, and that then he will, in the political manner, "fix" things. The literary agent, of course, has the drop, so to say, on the novice author only in this: that he has made it his business to know which magazine, or publishing house, is the best bet for this or for that. The

literary agent is of service to the author who himself knows something of the ropes in that he relieves the author of the bother of marketing his wares, and frees him for his own business—writing. The literary agent may save a very great deal of time for an author residing a far distance from the publishing centre. So distinguished an author as Max Beerbohm, for instance, residing much of the time in Italy, utilizes the services of a literary agent to negotiate the placing of his work in New York. Also, if you conceive of yourself as a member of the aristocracy of intellect, you may regard it as more compatible with your artistic dignity to leave bargaining over the things of your mind to bargaining men. Or, on the other hand, if you fancy yourself as a pretty shrewd person of business, and have not made a business of peddling manuscripts for years, a literary agent may interpret to you many points outside the range of your experience. But—it is of prime importance that you (if you are in the way of requiring one) select a literary agent with the same particular care that you would select, say, a lawyer. There are lawyers and lawyers, you know.

§ *Criticising and Editing Manuscripts.*

It is not the purpose of this chapter to promote the business of literary agents; but simply to present some of their experiences and to state their functions, which seem to be somewhat popularly misunderstood. Some literary agents make it a part of their business to criticize and revise manuscripts for a small fee. That it is not the business of publishing houses to give a detailed, or even a general criticism of manuscripts submitted, is certainly a matter very far from being generally understood. It is the exception when a manuscript from an unknown author comes into a publishing house unaccompanied by a letter reading something like this: "I should be deeply indebted to you if you would write me in the frankest spirit what you think of the book; whether you think it has any merit as a novel, whether it might be edited so that it might be salable, whether there is merit in the conception, whether there is too much or too little dialogue. And you may be as harsh as you like without fear of wounding an aspiring author."

There is no evidence that there exists a publishing house with a relish for wounding any-

body; but very often a letter of criticism from a publisher written in the frankest spirit to an aspiring author is likely to bring this sort of reply: "The comment has been made that my book is not a money-maker. I think that is a mistake. It does not fill out the familiar lines of a mushy best-selling romance. But I believe it would have a considerable sale if properly pushed. It took me five years merely to put it on paper."

And in the cases where a manuscript is returned with merely a formal note politely stating the decisive fact that the publisher cannot see his way to undertaking its publication, he is apt to receive an indignant retort charging that there was "not a word of criticism" in his communication and declaring that the author "had a right to expect more than that."

§ *Why Publishers Do Not Criticise Manuscripts.*

As to why a publisher frequently does not care to give a detailed criticism of an unsolicited manuscript, there may be a number of reasons, which seem to be very little comprehended generally. It may be the policy of his house not to do this. For one thing, a publisher's attitude toward a manuscript cannot be that of a disinterested pro-

fessor of literature; it relates to the business of his house, to the matter of the shaping of his list, to the situation with him at the moment as to the things he happens to stand in need of or not stand in need of, and to divers other considerations which are not purely pertinent to the character of the manuscript; nor are they the affairs of the author. Also such criticism might very likely more confuse an author than help him. For the reason that what one house would tell him might very likely be quite different from what another house would tell him. In which case the perplexed author might very naturally conclude that both houses were either some kind of liars or fools. And, further, a publisher cannot afford to employ an academic staff whose duties would be to give its time to the constructive criticism of bales of rejected manuscript. All this is not to say that excellent criticism of this nature is not infrequently given gratuitously by the editors of publishing houses to unknown authors of submitted manuscripts. It is interesting to recall that some of the ablest, most conscientious, and elaborate criticisms of this sort were written by Sinclair Lewis in the days when he was employed as a publisher's literary adviser.

§ *Suave Rejection Slips Make Many Friends.*

Then there is a style of writing a letter declining a manuscript which is so suave and diplomatic that often the recipient is impelled to reply that "to have a manuscript rejected by you is really a pleasure. It is almost as good as having it accepted." It's a gift.

And no harm, surely, in that. In being nice and polite to people. Kind to a fellow creature. That depends! There are a number of literary agents who are of the opinion that the thing is too generally much overdone. Here is a letter recently received by an agent:

Though I have *no* time *at all* for writing, I *cannot,* even after all these years of denial, silence the longing!

As I before remarked, had I only *myself* to think of I could decide, but—having my son and being *determined* to give him his chance—what should I do? Dare I hope that ultimately, after not *too* many years I can devote myself to writing and make enough money thereby to care for and educate my boy? Or should I give up the idea and turn every thought and spare moment toward advancement in the teaching profession? It will be a sacrifice—but one I must make if my longing and heart's desire is *only* longing and

nothing, or at least not *enough* of *something,* to justify faith and effort.

This manuscript is the most ambitious thing I have yet done, and I have put myself into its writing—that is, I have been utterly absorbed in it—and feel the subject matter deeply. I realize the theme is by no means a popular one, and *that* is, so far, the *only* criticism I have had upon it, and it has been *very well spoken of indeed* by some of those editors that have seen it; for instance—

Please write me freely in regard to it, that is, your opinion of *its possibilities,* and your opinion of *my capabilities* ("latent" if I dare to use the word) *and possibilities, probabilities* rather, for successful literary work.

I *must make—a living* at least—from the first, hence I need all the financial compensation that can be obtained.

Please pardon this diffuse and intimate letter —but I am so alone in the world I have *no* one to tell me frankly and straightforward what I have a right to believe of myself or to help me with an unbiased view of my work and my ability.

§ *Often Pathetically Interpreted.*

The "longing"—there you have it. It is all over the lot, the longing to "write." It is (quite frequently) in some very estimable hearts where it hasn't a ghost of a show to be realized. And

a phrase softly turned by a bland editor is often very pathetically interpreted.

God give him wisdom to know when it is the kinder part to be cold, for (when you realize it) it is a fearful game with the destiny of naïve souls that he plays, the editor. Another letter, one typical of many, to an agent:

> You see, I am a poor girl, and not a very strong one physically, and so I can't stenog all the year around, and it happens that I haven't been working over a year—otherwise I should jump at your offer, as I realize that without an agent I'll win success when I am on the verge of the grave, which is too long to wait.
>
> My writing is everything to me. The things other people find in pretty clothes, amusements, sweethearts, marriage, etc., I find in writing.
>
> I took my novel to a publishing house in Boston. They have had it 2 months now. The editor had a long talk with me. He was just lovely. He said I didn't send my stories out enough. He figured out that I must send each story to 25 magazines and if all refuse it then it's no good. I've been sending a story to 4 and then stop. He says they can't come to a decision on my novel, but for me to have patience. He's going to read it himself.
>
> I am enclosing one of the rejection slips I've been receiving from editors. You see it is not stereotyped. It is really a letter. They always

hope to see more of my work and they never take any of it.

Yes; they always hope to see more of your work, but they never take any of it.

§ *The Uncertain Test of Comparison.*

Why such untold multitudes long to write is one of the mysteries of human life. But why so very many people are firmly convinced that they *can* write is not so far to seek. The correspondence of a literary agent strikingly reveals the almost universal prevalence of the assumption that it doesn't take much ability to do better writing than much of that which gets published.

"Goodness gracious! Did you read 'The Hum Bee' in last week's 'Saturday Evening Post' by Laura Dayton?" begins a letter very representative of this popular feeling. The writer continues: "I think it is the silliest story I ever read. There is no plot to that. And the children depicted therein—twelve years old—are absolutely the stiffest, most unnatural creatures I have ever met up with, and yet she sold that story. I read just such a foolish one in 'The Ladies' Home Journal'—it was about a girl advising a man about wooing a sweetheart. Why is it that those

stories sell? If you gave me constructive criticism on my story wouldn't 'The Saturday Evening Post' take it? They publish worse drivel than that."

Many silly stories are, indeed, bought and published, no one can deny. And notwithstanding the continual assertion of fiction editors that they are forever keenly on the lookout for fresh and original talent, and that nothing gives them so much joy as to find it, stories of intrinsic merit now and then are for long turned down. It requires talent of one sort to "see" a fresh and original story as well as it takes talent of another sort to write one. And even talented editors have been known to take stories of a somewhat novel nature and then fail in the courage to print them. There is, for instance, the case of Mr. Tarkington's story "Cherry," taken on its merits as a waggish farce, a whimsical tale with a consummately polished surface, by Henry Mills Alden, when the author was practically unknown. It lay in his desk for several years, presumably regarded in the light of an unhappy selection—as an editorial *faux pas,* perhaps—until the success of the author's other books (written later) brought it quickly out of its obscurity in manu-

script or galley form, and led to its swift publication with a greatly augmented value. Some such incident probably is what kindly speaking editors have in mind when they tell disappointed young authors not to change their stories but to hold them just as they are until they are more successful, when perhaps they can publish them. As to that, if you are successful enough in making some lucky strike, you can (as you have noticed) dig up anything and get it published—for a while.

"There was another 'Hum Bee' story in 'The Saturday Eve. Post,' " wrote, in a later letter, the young lady above referred to. "It was worse than the first." A literary agent will tell you, however, that in general if you really analyze the stories that strike you this way you will find, underlying the silliness, a new idea, or an original twist to the plot, or a fresh incident which makes the story different from others of its kind. And that, according to his experience, it is this bit of originality which turns an otherwise hopeless manuscript into a "salable" story.

§ *Literary Agents as Father Confessors.*

An editor to a considerable extent, but a literary agent even more so, appears to be regarded

by a vast number of striving souls as a sort of Father Confessor. In the simple sincerity of their ambition, and often amid an environment which they feel not to be in sympathy with it, they turn out their hearts in letters to that wise, powerful, and wondrous being who sits at the center of the world of their desire, and tell about their birth, schooling, marriage, and need of money. Here is one of these letters to an agent, which is itself, doubtless, far more of a real story than the author of it will ever write to try to sell:

I will explain my situation to you and will then ask you pointedly if you think it worth the while to try and write stories to sell. I ran away and married very young, barely sixteen, and my marriage was a failure from the very beginning. My husband left for parts unknown, leaving me with two little girls to support the best way I can. At present I am employed in the capacity of a stenographer and earning only a small salary.

I have a great desire to rise over difficulties that have been mine for so long. I want to get out of the rut into which I have fallen, through really no fault of mine.

Writing has always come easily to me. At school themes and compositions were only as child's play to me, while writing letters was a source of amusement. I have just recently attempted to write.

Now I would be glad if you would give me your frank opinion, for I am sure that it would be worth while from one of your experience. I have no money to spend that will not bring results, for in spending any on criticisms it would mean privations from sources such as going without lunch or things of that matter, but I would not mind if it would later mean something that would give me the means of doing something really worth while and would help my children.

Please pardon the airing of domestic sorrows as it were the family clothes line, to be viewed in passing, but I thought if I told you my exact situation you would know better how to advise me.

If you think the story worth while, I will gladly send the amount.

Thanking you for your attention to the matter.

The "story" sent presented no conception at all of the form or construction of a story. It was simply conversation between a man and a woman, the woman calling the man all sorts of "names" because he does not love her.

§ *The Agent's Reward.*

The novice writer seems to be much more temperamental than the professional writer, and in his relations with literary agents to have ideas of

business which are very unbusinesslike. Real writers, the literary agent tells you, make no bones about their bill. The average attitude of the novice writer is that the agent undertakes to offer the manuscript for sale on a commission basis if sold, with no charge if unsuccessful. When, after prolonged efforts with it, the literary agent at length returns to the author of it a manuscript which he has found cannot be placed, making no charge for his time, but sending a small bill to cover postage he has spent, he is very likely never to hear again from that person, who has probably got "sore." Indeed, there is the case where the husband of an amateur writer, a physician in the middle west, angrily wrote an agent that if any more of his nefarious bills were sent he would have the agent arrested. Though there is another story of an opulent lady who sent with her manuscript a blank check, signed.

With a world full of people clamoring to have their literary efforts "criticized," literary agents often are inclined to recommend correspondence courses in the short story as a helpful thing for beginners. And they, literary agents, not seldom "get in bad" in that way. As, when a correspondence school has praised a student's story

(possibly at some places with a view to encourage him to take the next course in "advanced story writing") and the literary agent finds he cannot sell it, the student is very apt to think him a "goat."

## IV

### WHY BE AN AUTHOR?

A VERY distinguished author took the trouble to write a long letter of comment on the early chapters of this book shortly after their original appearance in "The Bookman" magazine. His letter begins in a highly complimentary spirit, but a bit later grows rather doleful. Among other things, it says: "They [the chapters] will inspire in the bosoms of young writers the thought, 'How simple! I'll try again!' "

His letter continues: "Not that the budding authors of these days need sympathy. Many of them need suppressing. Nearly all of them need apprenticeship. I recall a young man in New Orleans, son of a lady who let rooms. He was taking a course in English literature and short story writing. I told him, in an absent way, merely to show I was interested and to make con-

versation, that I had once had a book published. He said, 'Oh, of course, that comes later.' "

Well, this simple-hearted young man was, at any rate, pursuing an apprenticeship, of a sort. And that word "apprenticeship," it should be evident, has been one repeatedly encountered in the researches among editors, publishers, and established writers which have largely contributed to the substance of this book.

As for trying again, what else is there for the "struggling" young author to do? But it is not the intention of this book to present the matter of becoming an author as a simple one. Far from it. Various ways of approaching editors and publishers are discussed in other chapters. The innumerable persons aspiring to write for publication are full of questions as to what they should do to succeed. A question which is highly pertinent to consider is, Why write at all?

§ *A Failure at Everything Else.*

An extensive investigation into the motives which lead a vast host of people to attempt to write for publication would probably bring out a situation at first odd to contemplate. A great many of these people, it would likely be found,

turn to the idea of writing because, for one reason or another, they have failed at everything else they have undertaken. "It is all I am fitted to do," says a letter from a woman who hopes to obtain a "broader outlook" on life and to help provide for her son through her "love of writing." Another letter confesses: "I certainly hope that I can do something with my stories for I am a failure at everything else I go into." And a third letter states the writer's reason for taking up authorship thus: "I am almost ready to give up library work; have put in two months and nothing to show for my efforts yet. The waiting is weary."

Almost all of us have to find some sort of livelihood. When unfortunate in affairs near at home, we are likely to look toward some happily veiled distant horizon. "As I am trying to get a little money to help a loved one I am sending you two song poems," says a communication. "As a result of the much talked of H. C. of L. I am faced by the necessity of earning a living for myself and others," is the story told in innumerable letters concerning manuscripts. In the letter just quoted the next statement is this: "In appraising my various qualifications I feel no doubt

in saying that the thing I can do best and with the least effort is to express myself well in writing."

And many and many a one is attracted by the stories of "big money" and quick success in the "writing game." "I was persuaded to try my hand at story writing because of the colossal sums publishers would pay for acceptable Ms.," writes a citizen of Georgia. Advertisements stating that so many million words of fiction are bought annually by American magazine editors give the impression that the demand is far in excess of the supply. Writing stories "looks so easy" that many, particularly folk not occupied with success in something else, are inclined to "give it a trial," believing that there is nothing to lose and maybe much to gain—"easy money" to gain.

§ *Craving for Fame and Admiration.*

Reason number two why people want to write would probably be found in the countless number of ambitious, sentimental people who have a craving for the "limelight." So many of us want to be famous; known all over the country; talked about, quoted and admired! Many aspire to the stage or struggle for an entrance into the movies;

more, vastly more, buy (or rent) a typewriter and lay in some copy paper. To go on the stage or into the movies requires a good deal of effort. And then it means giving up the job you may have, leaving home, and probably starting in with a small rôle and smaller pay. "Writing" requires no risk or discomfort. A typewriter, some paper, a few stamped envelopes, perhaps a dictionary, maybe a book on How to Do It, and a spare hour or two now and then, and one can fancy that he is equipped and ready to become famous over night.

If all the people in this country who want to write could be gathered in one place (a tremendous sight it would be!), and if a voice from a huge megaphone asked those to stand up who once wrote a story "just for the fun of it" and then showed it to a friend whose enthusiastic encouragement led to their idea of becoming published authors—there would be a mighty uprising. Once an innocent, amateur author has shown a story of his to a friend or relative, he (a gentleman dealing much in manuscripts said the other day) is lost. Until the day of his death he will be hounded by that friend and everyone else who knows of his experiment. "You must

keep at your writing," they will say. "Don't give up. I see much worse stuff than yours in the magazines every day. Don't be discouraged. Sooner or later you will be recognized."

§ *Egged On by Laudation of Friends.*

Sometimes one does not even go so far as to write out a story before his friends egg him on to become an author. An illustration of this is given in the following note:

The writer is enclosing herewith a MS for your consideration. I wish to inform you that this story is a true story. The author was an eye witness of this phenoma which occurred for the first time in the month of June, 1908.

I have told this story to groups of people at different times, and same has been received with much interest and amazement. For this reason I believe that this story would make a "Hit" providing it would be properly revised.

Then every here and there may be discovered persons who have had more or less experience in writing, and who write capably enough one kind of thing, who want to write something quite different. An architect, for instance, or an engineer, who has contributed articles of value to the journals of his profession, or a man engaged in

business who may have written authoritatively on, say, cotton for a trade paper, considers that writing salable fiction on the side would not be a thing outside his scope.

Now and then somebody confesses a reason for wanting to write which is somewhat unusual. A letter from an adventurous soul in the far west states: "Although making a good living from my trade, if I thought for one moment that by steady and strict application to the business of writing I could make a success I would certainly follow it up for the following reasons: I like writing, my imagination is good, I write fast (which probably accounts for my poor penmanship), but most important of all—*I could stay at home.*"

A singular case recently come across in an editorial office was that of a person who had, so to say, got drawn into writing without wanting to write at all. As her letter said: "So far as writing stories myself is concerned I was never gifted or talented, and never thought of such a thing. My natural talents ran along another line. I even hated to write a letter and was always a failure at school." Then she explained:

"I now receive almost everything I wish for from the unseen invisible Authors by Automatic writings, most of the plots are very fine indeed, and it is very interesting to me to receive them. I write about places I have never seen and people and countries that are strange to me. The stories are almost complete, but the descriptions and clothes are not given. The plots, the conversations and the ideas are always good—from certain high inspirational Spirits, and of course some are given from Souls not so highly developed, also. . . . I can receive a plot almost any moment."

§ *Helps Some to Pass the Time.*

An interesting motive for wanting to write is presented in a letter from a woman who says: "I am anxious to become a writer, for I now live in a small town, with nothing of interest here, and that will help me pass the time." She apparently overlooks the matter of telling what it is that calls to her for expression. Presumably, she has not been tortured as was Keats:

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
> Before high-piled books, in charact'ry,
> Hold like full garners the full ripen'd grain.

But others, it seems, to some degree are in his predicament. This from another letter, representative of a class of those written to persons in the business of handling manuscripts by people who want to write: "But, oh! I have seen so much of wild life on the border—adventure—gold hunting—crime and danger—that I hate to go to my grave with it all *untold,* unknown!" Again, a desire to write frequently seems to spring from something of a sporting temper: So-and-so had a story in the "Post," "dealing with hunger and hard-upness, that stirred my competitive spirit."

§ *Others Have "the Gift."*

Many with a yearning to write have ceased to be young. A—what shall one say?—a hankering to write not infrequently smolders through the adversities of many years. One "past fifty years of age . . . with no literary education, training or ability, so far as anyone knows," writes: "Like many other men, I have often thought I had a talent which circumstances starved in my youth." Another: "From mere childhood it was always my one ambition to be an AUTHOR." Again: "I know I can write; it has been a gift to me from girlhood." And a person of rather Topsy-like

temperament says: "For years and years I have been told that I had talent—and I guess I have."

Frequently, too, the desire to write is declared by quite unpublished writers to be ineradicable. A letter from one who wants criticism "the worst way" says: "But if you should say that I had better give up writing I am afraid I couldn't obey, for my faith has grown blind from old age, but is still alive and won't be downed."

So many, and more, are reasons why people want to write. The distinguished author with whose comment this chapter opened very probably would see very little hope for any of the aspirants from whose letters quotations have here been made. And doubtless most people with any practical experience of the business of writing would agree with him. Yet it is undeniable that people have succeeded who have written from the reasons, some of the reasons, that have just been discussed. One does not have to delve very deeply into literary history to discover writers of enduring fame who did make their mark in literature after having failed at about everything else they had attempted; and who admitted that they were "good for" nothing else. People (now and then) have, indeed, succeeded passably well at

writing who wrote from need of money. A desire for fame has not been absent from the minds of men who have become illustrious authors. Such a thing has happened as a man or a woman becoming an author through having written a story merely to amuse his children, or hers. Men eminent in medicine or the law or something else unrelated to literature have turned with much facility to fiction. Distinguished achievements have been made in literature by persons who took up authorship well along in life. And so on.

§ *What the Would-be Author Faces.*

Of those things, indeed, much (probably over much) has been told. What the would-be writer has had little opportunity to know is just what he faces.

First, there should be considered the immense amount of competition. To anyone who has had to do with editing a magazine it seems that ninety-nine people out of every hundred are writing or trying to write for publication. Would the rudimentary writer enter the lists in any other competition against such a vast multitude of contestants? Then, actually, there is comparatively small demand for creative writing. That is, the

number of magazines, after all, is fairly limited. If you have a story of a distinct type, and you make a list of the magazines for which it is entirely suitable, you will find hardly more than three or four. And there is room in each magazine for only a comparatively small number of features. There is room, all over the United States, for thousands of physicians and lawyers. But there would need to be hundreds of more magazines in America than there are to make room for thousands of new writers.

Advertisements proclaiming that there are thousands of dollars to be made by writing stories put very false notions into the heads of many people. The relatively few authors of great popularity do, of course, receive very substantial incomes from their work. But the income derived from the writing of numerous authors of very fair popularity is not sufficient for their needs. You find them acting as editors, publishers' readers, professors, lecturers, farmers, as officers in service on the sea, and what not.

§ *Prices Paid for Manuscripts.*

In fact, the payment for writing in general is ridiculously small. Five cents a word is high pay,

indeed, for a writer with more or less of a name. Anything over two cents a word is doing pretty well. Many magazines pay one cent a word or less. Some actual prices paid by well-known publications are here given: twelve dollars for a 2,500 word story; twelve dollars for a 1,200 word story, *paid on publication;* ten dollars for a 4,000 word story that had been rejected by more than a score of editors; twenty-five dollars for a 4,000 word story; fifty dollars for a 4,000 word story.

Able writers who attempt to live by "free lance" writing not seldom have a precarious time of it. One must be wary of counting on payment for his work by any certain date. An editor accepts a manuscript, maybe after holding it for some time for consideration; he "puts through" a voucher for payment to the author; this perhaps gets stalled somewhere in the machinery of the business office of the magazine; and it is a week or two before the author gets his money. And magazines themselves, every once in a while, have a precarious time of it; when their contributors are not paid for a considerable period. Instances have been when the contributors to the final numbers of a wabbling magazine were not paid at all.

An experienced writer "on his own" may earn

a couple of hundred dollars or so in one week, and for several weeks afterward average something like fourteen dollars and eighty-four cents. The beginner writer should not consider that he has "arrived" when he has sold one story, or even several; it may be a year before he places another. And the future of a writer who may be having a very fair success now is not any too secure. Public taste changes. New orders come in. The kind of thing which took so well yesterday may be quite out of fashion tomorrow.

§ *Royalties on Published Books.*

There is among people generally much misconception as to the profits ordinarily derived by the author from the publication of a book. The price of a novel today is about two dollars. Usually the author receives a royalty of about twenty cents a copy on the first two thousand copies sold, and perhaps thirty cents on each copy thereafter. A novel which sold upward of fifty thousand copies would then bring the author something like fourteen thousand dollars. Many men make as much as fourteen thousand dollars by a year's work at some other business or profession than authorship. But authors who make that amount

in a year, or anything near that amount, are exceedingly rare. A book is regarded by the publisher as highly successful if it sells from five to ten thousand copies. Far and away the greater number of books published do not sell as many as fifteen hundred copies. Many far less. A recently published book which received a very cordial "press," has had an uncommon amount of publicity, and the advertisements of which announce that it is in its "fourth printing," has after about half a year earned for its author perhaps a thousand dollars. Its sale now in active measure is over. An author is fairly fortunate who receives as much as five or six hundred dollars from the sale of his book. An excellent story was published something over a year ago which was much praised by many reviewers. It took the author probably the better part of a year to write it. He was then six months or more getting it accepted. He has not been able to place much of anything since. At the end then of two years and a half he has received from his literary labors about one hundred and ten dollars. He could have earned that amount in a week at the occupation which was his before he turned author. He is, nevertheless, determined to continue writ-

ing fiction. In a letter published in the Authors' League "Bulletin" of April, 1916, William T. Ellis stated that his share of the total receipts from the sale of his book, "Billy Sunday: The Man and His Message," of which, he said, 300,000 copies had been sold, was $1,000, "less a few hundred dollars in cancelled lecture engagements and other special expenses made necessary by the writing of the book."

But before one who would write comes to face the matters which have just been outlined, there is another affair which he must first face. And that, indeed, cannot be too much dwelt upon. He must equip himself to write.

"Is it necessary to go to school to be a Journalist?" asks the writer of a letter from Oregon. "I have never written before because I have always considered a good education was necessary; and that is something I lack," writes another, from Oklahoma. "To undertake to begin at the bottom and educate myself along literary lines would mean putting in quite a bit of time, and I do not desire to undertake it unless I should find it worth while," observes the author of a letter from Texas. And the writer of another letter from the west has, evidently, with some sur-

prise, suddenly come upon a truth not widely grasped. "I should have realized," he says, "that at least as much hard work, if not more, was required in story writing as in any other profession."

§ *What Every Would-be Author Should Know.*

Yes; one certainly must "go to school" to become a writer. And yet no school can really teach one how to be an author. That is to say, one must school one's self. One of the most brilliant and successful of contemporary American journalists recommends for the amateur constant, and rapid, writing. Another view is held by the author with whose comment this chapter was begun. He is William McFee, and his words should be well weighed by the literary aspirant. His letter continues:

A most important point, to me, is the question of equipment. I do feel that the young authors of today, published and otherwise, are scantily equipped for the career they propose to follow. I attribute this partly to the defective system in the schools and partly to the movies. I have been rendered decidedly uneasy when talking to people actually in literature, by the slenderness of their mental equipment. Of course, some sorts of literary work not only need no equip-

ment but would be impossible with it. The essential quality of some pieces of writing would be lost if the authors had "had advantages," as they used to say.

Those, however, are very special cases. I do think that the average young American is in need of that equipment which is comprised in early omnivorous reading. They read too many new books. Here, you see, I am stirring up old mud, for I am about to utter the ancient complaint that if you are to do well you must have a standard, and to have a standard you must read what has been done. . . . It is the same in all the arts. What La Farge, speaking of painting, said about "the acquired memories of the artist," is true of and can be applied to authorship.

The acquired memories of the artist! So I urge the young writer not to write at all, but to acquire memories, in short to read. If he or she asks, "What shall I read?" I shall reply sadly, "I'm afraid it won't make any difference. Because there is always in these matters an instinct. Read."

I hope you will persist in harping upon the difficulties of authorship. I do not mean the actual trouble of getting published—that is largely imaginary nowadays—but the difficulty of deserving publication when you get it. And you will not deserve it if you concentrate upon the technical and monetary aspects of your art. It seems to be the most difficult thing in the world to get people to see that literature is a creative

art. You brood and suffer and destroy and rewrite and give up in despair. You eventually emerge from your travail with something far from satisfactory to yourself but remotely resembling the thing you desire to create. And when people read the book and see that character which has given you so much agony to produce, they blandly ask you where you saw him, or her, who is the original. They can't believe he (or she) is the figment of your imagination. They don't believe a writer has to think at all. He does.

Harp on that! He cannot be easily a thinker. And he must be.

## V

### SEEING A BOOK THROUGH THE PRESS

A PUBLISHER of very large activities remarked that there were a number of things he would "like to see said" in one of the chapters of this book. He had in mind, it developed, instructions regarding the preparation of manuscripts to be submitted for publication. "And it ought to be pretty elementary stuff," he added.

Probably it ought to be. Here are examples of inquiries frequently received by those dealing with manuscripts:

> By the way, are my MSS. decent enough in format: are there too many corrections, etc.? Do editors object to carbon copies as they are supposed to do?

> Will you please tell me in a hand written does it matter if all the brevations are not put in Pleas ansure this question as it has puzzeled me greatly.

One thing I fell down on miserably was writing this story on transparent paper, but as I did not discover the error until the work was well advanced I decided to let it ride this time and make a note for the future.

Manuscripts come into editorial offices in an extraordinary number of sizes, shapes, and designs. Stories typed on white paper, yellow paper, pink paper, and blue paper. Editors questioned on the subject could not recall any on red paper, or green paper; but probably such things have been. Manuscripts have arrived typed on transparent paper, on tissue paper, on waxed paper, and on heavy linen paper. A gentleman who has read many manuscripts reported that the most devilish manuscript he had ever read was hand written, in pencil, on both sides of the pages in a "dummy" novel such as the salesmen of publishing houses carry on the road. And that particular manuscript was written by a man who had had five years of experience in publishing houses, had been fifteen years with a New York newspaper, and had three published books to his credit! Another interesting manuscript that this gentleman recalled was written in ink on both sides of the pages in several stenographer's note-

books. The ink had soaked through the paper so that it was almost impossible for anyone to read the writing.

§ *Preparing the Manuscript.*

Now it has been continually stated by editors that to receive proper attention manuscripts should be typewritten, on one side of the page only. It has not so frequently been said that it is best for black ink to be used, for the paper to be white, and of medium weight. A uniform size of paper should be used throughout the manuscript. The size most convenient to handle is eight by ten or eleven inches. A fault of many inexperienced writers is their use of three or four different kinds and sizes of paper in one manuscript. Carbon copies are not only difficult to read, but they are likely to give the impression that the original copy has been worn out by journeys back and forth through the mails to other editors.

To invite the friendliness of an editor a manuscript should have liberal margins. A good plan is a margin at the top of the page of at least one inch, with a margin of an inch and a bit more at the left hand side. Double spacing on the

typewriter should be used. Triple spacing is perhaps even better. When handwritten script is employed there should be a space of at least half an inch between the lines.

Pages should be numbered consecutively to the end of the manuscript. Many authors number the pages in each chapter, the first page of each chapter being numbered one. This is a bad practice, and may result in the loss of parts of a manuscript. Inserted pages should be numbered alphabetically, as: 24a, 24b, 24c, 24d and so on. Discarded pages should be accounted for on the page preceding the pages removed. So: a page marked 50-54 would indicate that pages 51, 52, 53, and 54 had been cut out by the author. Page 55 would then be the next page looked for by the manuscript reader. If a part of a page is to be attached to another page or part of a page, paste or mucilage should be used, *pins never.*

§ *Manuscripts Not to Be Bound.*

Many authors have their typoscripts, when of book length, bound in board covers before submitting them. This is a mistake. Such bound affairs are awkward to handle, and tiresome to read—as the reader has to hold the entire bulky

manuscript while he is reading. Also the typewriter paper easily tears out of the binding. The pages of a manuscript should never be fastened together by anything but paper clips. But why fasten them together at all? A better plan is simply to keep the manuscript in a pasteboard box such as the boxes in which typewriter paper is sold. The author should understand that when the manuscript is sent to the printer it is split up among a number of typesetters or linotype operators. When the pages of a manuscript are fastened together there is a danger of mutilating them in separating them one from another.

Typewritten manuscripts should have about the same number of words on each page. This can best be accomplished by taking care to write the same number of lines on each page. A good arrangement is for a manuscript to contain twenty-five lines to a page, with the lines averaging about ten words. The result is 250 words to a page. This is a small matter to the author, but of great help to the editor and printer. When the editor or printer desires to know the number of words in any section of the manuscript, such as a chapter, all he has to do is to count the

number of pages in the section and multiply it by 250—and there he is.

Paragraphs should be indented. It is necessary to the appearance of a book that the paragraphs be not over-long. About two hundred words, not over three hundred words, is a very fair length. A book with long paragraphs and solid type pages does not look anywhere near so interesting as a book whose pages are frequently broken by new paragraphs. Chapters, also, should not be too long. A book of 80,000 words should contain from ten to twenty chapters. The nearer twenty probably the better.

As a rule, footnotes should be used sparingly, rarely if ever in fiction manuscripts. As far as is possible the information should be incorporated in the text. When a footnote is used it should appear in the manuscript immediately after the line to which it applies; and should be typewritten between two lines and after the word "Note," as follows:

. . . and I was touched and charmed." *

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NOTE: * Lair, *Un maître de Sainte-Beuve.*

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If illustrations accompany a manuscript it is well for the author to note carefully in the manu-

script the position selected by him for each illustration.

Manuscripts should not be elaborately gotten up. It should be the purpose of the author to submit his story or book in the most readable, neat and readily handled form. There should be as few pen and ink corrections as possible. And the manuscript as a whole should be complete and ready to be sent to the composing room as soon as accepted.

After a manuscript is accepted it is generally gone over by the literary editor, or book editor, who may suggest some changes or who may edit the manuscript to conform with the style of his particular magazine or publishing house. After these minor changes, if there are any, have been made, the manuscript is sent to the composing room, where it is distributed among the typesetters.

§ *Correcting the "Galley" Proofs.*

The lines of type are placed in a shallow metal container known as a galley. A galley will hold three or four pages of book type. Proofs are taken of each galley. These galley proofs are compared with the original manuscript by the

proof readers of the magazine or publishing house, and the typesetters' errors are then corrected. New proofs are taken and sent to the author in duplicate with the manuscript. One of the two sets of proofs sent to the author either has a number of corrections marked upon it or else has a memorandum stamped upon it in red ink. This is the proof the author must return after he has marked his corrections upon it. The other set of proofs should be retained by the author, and upon this set he should carefully copy all of the corrections that he has made upon the set returned to the printer. Authors should not use a lead pencil in correcting proofs, as the marks are very likely to become illegible, especially if the proofs are sent any distance through the mail. Either ink or a crayon pencil ought to be used.

Authors will very often find a question mark, or "Qy," in the margin of their proofs. This means that the publisher's proof reader has found a statement, or spelling, or construction which he is not sure of himself, and which he desires the author to O. K. or correct. The point may be an inconsistency in the manuscript, or a quotation the proof reader recognizes to be wrong, or some-

thing like that. The question mark or "Qy" should be *marked through* by the author when he does not make the suggested correction. This shows that he has noted the matter in dispute and has decided to let it remain as it stands. Much inconvenience and delay is caused when an author neglects to do this, as when the proof is returned the proof readers are at a loss as to what to do.

§ *Additional Charges for Alterations.*

Authors should understand (though many of them evidently do not) that to follow out in the composing room any of the corrections or alterations that they make on their proofs, costs money. Publishers agree in their contracts with authors to pay only a certain percentage of the cost of corrections. When an author writes into the text on his proofs any appreciable amount of new matter he will be charged for having it set in type. Some very unfortunate disagreements between publishers and authors have arisen from the failure of the author to understand this rule of the publishing business. There is a case where a friendship of long standing was impaired.

When the proofs have been corrected by the author they are called foul proofs. The galleys

of type are corrected from the foul proofs. New proofs, called revised proofs, are then taken. These revised proofs are compared with the foul proofs by the proof readers. Some publishing houses send revised proofs to the author, others do not unless the author has made a special request to see them. If the author demands to see revised proofs he will probably delay the publication of his work. Some publishing houses (some very distinguished ones) do not send the author either galley proofs or revised proofs except upon his special request, or in the case of illustrated books.

§ *Page Proofs Show Corrections.*

The type is next taken out of the galleys and carefully arranged into pages. The number of the page, the title of the book or the chapter headings are added, and each type page is securely fastened together with a string. Proofs are then taken of the type pages. These page proofs are sent to the author in duplicate. He should go over them carefully to make sure that all of his original corrections, on the galley proofs, have been made. No further corrections should be made upon the page proofs unless they

are absolutely necessary, because a line or two changed may require the rearrangement of several pages or even an entire chapter.

Final corrections are made on the type pages, which are then arranged for the electrotyping process, and locked in a form which holds them firmly together. Just before the electrotype plates are made, proofs are taken of the type pages. These are called plate proofs. They are examined to make sure that no lines have slipped out of the type pages during the process of placing them and locking them in the forms. Plate proofs are sometimes sent to the author. But, as a rule, not in time for him to make further corrections before the plates are actually made.

Electrotype plates are then cast for each page, and any additional corrections made thereafter by the author are an expensive matter, because this demands the cutting of one or more plates, and may require the resetting of a page and the casting of an entirely new plate. Plate proofs may be distinguished from page proofs by the heavy black rule that appears around the pages. This black border is made by the ink from pieces of metal known as guards, which are placed about the type to hold it fast while the cast is taken.

An author's first experience with plate proofs has sometimes been rather embarrassing to him. Stories are told of new authors returning them double quick with tempestuous notes demanding an explanation for the appearance of the mourning border, its immediate removal, and insisting that they see a new set of plate proofs.

§ *Handling "Engraver's Copy."*

Material and instructions for illustrations should be furnished to the publisher apart from the manuscripts. This data is engraver's copy, the rest of the manuscript is printer's copy. These two kinds of material are kept separate and are sent to entirely different departments. Drawings, prints, unmounted photographs and so on, should not be folded or rolled. Photographs should be made on glossy photographic paper for best results.

When a book is to have only a few (two or three) illustrations they are generally made full page size, printed separately on coated or calendered paper, and inserted when the book is bound. When there are a number of illustrations, some of which are to appear in the text, the entire book is printed on coated or calendered paper, and the

cuts inserted in the type pages. Proofs of such illustrations are sent to the author with the galley proofs, and the author must indicate on the proofs where he desires each picture placed. This can be done only on the galley proofs, as the cuts must be placed in the pages and must be shown on the page proofs.

Many authors indicate the position of cuts on the galley proofs by writing something like this in the margin of the proof: "Insert here illus. No. 1—Mrs. Hunt sitting on lawn with Bobs in her lap."

This means nothing to the engraver because, in the first place, he hasn't read the manuscript and doesn't know what Mrs. Hunt looks like, nor whether Bobs is a cat, dog, or child; and in the second place, he has in his shop probably a half dozen or more cuts of various women sitting on lawns holding cats, dogs, or children in their laps, and he won't have the slightest idea which is the cut of Mrs. Hunt and Bobs. The only safe thing for the author to do is to *paste* in the margin of the galley proof, the proof of the particular illustration which he desires to appear in that special place.

§ *Changing Copy to Fit Pages.*

In the case of newspapers and magazines, when there is not quite enough room on the page for the amount of copy in hand, many of the leads which the printer places between the lines of type are removed, and the lines of type placed closer together. When there is not quite enough copy, leads are inserted between the lines, thus filling the page by stretching out the printed matter with spacing between the lines. This can be done in newspapers and magazines that are rushed through the presses, quickly read, and soon forgotten. But books are a different matter, and more skill is required to set them. So authors are very often requested to add to or take from their copy, that the compositor can exactly fill a page without having to resort to extra leads. Sometimes authors fly into a rage at being dictated to by the printer. The author should remember that to the printer a book is just so much metal.

Authors should be sure to write their names and addresses at the upper left hand corner of the first page of their manuscripts. Although not absolutely necessary, it is a good thing to

have the author's name (at least his last name) appear in the upper left hand corner of every page of his manuscript. As has been explained, manuscripts are cut up into sections of so many pages, and each section is given to a different compositor to set. These sections are called takes. When the author's name appears on every page there is no danger of the takes being confused with other takes allotted to the same compositor. There was a case on a well known magazine where interviews were obtained with two prominent persons on the same subject. The copy of these two interviews had not been carefully marked by the writers before being sent to the composing room. The takes were mixed and the two interviews were set up as one article. In the first few paragraphs the person interviewed was reported to have expressed certain opinions and in the last few paragraphs he was made to contradict flatly every one of these opinions. When the proofs reached the editor he realized at once that a mistake must have been made. He called for the original manuscript but found it impossible to separate the two interviews. Result: the articles were killed and the writers lost their pay for their work. Had each page

shown the name of the writer it would have been an easy matter to separate the interviews.

§ *Publisher Decides Upon Style and Format.*

It is generally agreed in the contracts between publishers and authors that the selection of the size of the book, the style of the type page, the kind of paper and style of binding, the question of illustrations, and the design of the paper jacket, be left to the publisher. But the author is free to make suggestions, which sometimes are helpful—but not generally so. The publisher, as a rule, is the better judge of these things. They happen to be his business.

The manufacturing man in a well known publishing house one time wrote: "The art of printing is so largely a mechanical art, with fixed restrictions as to what can and what cannot be done within a given space of type, that even the experienced writer will sometimes find himself confronted with results that had not occurred to him as possible."

De Vinne said: "It is the correctness and the careful arrangement of text-matter more than any novelty in plan, grace in display, or skill in decoration that give distinction to any book.

Next to clearness of expression on the part of the author comes clearness in its reproduction by the printer." This could also apply to the author's original manuscript which he submits to the editor. And it suggests that it might be well for the author to appreciate the part the printer plays in the success of his book. The author should unhesitatingly leave a good deal to the judgment of the publisher and printer.

## VI

### PUBLISHING YOUR OWN BOOK

"To the Vanity Publisher, Sir," She Said

*"Where are you going, my pretty maid?"*
*"I'm going to publish, sir," she said.*
*"Perhaps you've a fortune, my pretty maid."*
*"My verse is my fortune, sir," she said.*
*"Then you'd better not try it, my pretty maid.*
*There's an item for printing, and when it is paid*
*There's 'commission on sales'—O, innocent maid!*
*In your rural retreat have you heard of* THE TRADE*?*
*Oh, where are you going, my pretty maid?"*

—Ernest Radford in "London Old and New"

IN a preceding chapter mention was made of "authors' books"—volumes the publication of which has been paid for in part, or in large measure, or vastly overpaid for by their authors. What, as well as the facts can be assembled, are the whys and wherefores of this matter?

Two quite contrary attitudes prevail toward

the idea of an author's being involved in the financing of his own work. On the one hand there is the great army of unsophisticated souls so longing to have something "published" in the form of a book that many of them, in their innocence of the procedure of legitimate publishing, readily fall the prey of the unscrupulous concerns which have come to be called "vanity publishers." These nefarious pay-as-you-enter "publishers" will be examined presently.

Then there is the opinion more than a little current among people with a closer view of book production that there is something highly unethical, discreditable to both publisher and author, in an author's having anything to do with the cost of issuing his work.

§ *Notable Examples of "Authors' Books."*

There are a number of classic examples of books of a very distinguished character paid for by the authors. Among them Drummond's "Natural Law in the Spiritual World" and Motley's "The Rise of the Dutch Republic." There is a legend that Longfellow insisted on owning his own books and paying for the plates and other costs of manufacture, though his publishers

would have been very glad indeed to assume all risk in the issuing of his work. An edition of "The Education of Henry Adams" was privately printed long before consent was obtained by the publishers to issue the regular trade edition. Among others such estimable gentlemen as Dr. S. Weir Mitchell and Thomas Nelson Page confessed some time ago to bringing out volumes of verse at their own expense. It is understood that Walter de la Mare's first volume was privately printed, and that Stephen Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage" was at first a privately printed book. That, certainly, is a fairly miscellaneous five foot shelf of authors' books.

§ *Publishers Cannot Take Big Risks.*

The publishing business, of course, like any other business, is an occupation pursued for at least reasonable gain. Naturally, the publisher considers the financial possibilities of every manuscript submitted to him. The number of books which he issues each year is limited to the amount of his capital. All this would seem to be elementary enough, and yet you may find ever so many people, particularly budding authors, who apparently have little active appreciation of it.

Very little indeed is the matter understood of the publisher having to balance his list. That is, it is necessary to bring out some books which he knows will be popular for him to be able to publish other books which he is well aware can have no large sale. As has been stated before in the pages of this book, a first-rate publisher every now and then takes on a book in which he sees no opportunity for profit, but which he has pride in having on his list. It goes without saying, however, that that is a luxury which must be bridled if the publisher is successfully to continue in business.

Now a neurologist, we will say, a man eminent in his specialty, produces as the result of much study a work on the pathological aspects of some writer. It is a book, he is confident, which has scientific value. He is disinterested as to any monetary profit which the book might possibly bring him, but desires to give it to the small portion of the world interested in his field of thought. Or a university professor, it may be, develops some thesis near to his heart. He believes that to publish this in a book would give him a higher status among his colleagues and might lead to advancement in his profession. In

both of these hypothetical cases it is most decidedly to the interests of the authors to obtain the imprint of a publishing house of established reputation.

§ *Why Reputable Houses Print "Authors' Books."*

A book is accepted by a reputable publisher to be issued at the author's expense, or partly at his expense, when the publisher is quite convinced that the book is worthy to be on his list, but that because of its subject and treatment, it can appeal to a small public only. Or (sometimes) when the author has undoubted talent, but is inexperienced and unknown and has handled subjects supposed by the publisher to be decidedly unpopular with the general public.

A reputable publisher, however, will tell an author at once that undoubtedly he is losing his money by publishing a book at his own expense, otherwise he (the publisher) would take the risk of issuing the volume. And he will write into the contract royalties in just proportion to the amount of expense which the author is assuming. On the other hand, the publisher should not be expected to undertake to promote the sale of the book as vigorously as if it were altogether his own

affair. He will manufacture it, announce it by advertisement, and place it in the hands of his salesmen. But where the publisher's risk is, there will be his greatest energy.

Sometimes authors of considerable reputation and popularity, whose work would be more than welcomed by any publishing house, enter into an arrangement with their publishers whereby they "put up" for an amount of advertising greater than the publishers could afford to devote even to them without such an arrangement. That is, they agree that a proportion of their royalties shall be diverted to cover the expense of additional advertising.

Historically a book copyrighted in the author's name was an author's book. And as the situation stands today an author's copyright is almost the hallmark of a publication paid for by the author. The whole subject of book copyright is a complex matter. Its intricacies need not detain us in this chapter. Some authors insist on a copyright in their own name. The heads of two of our foremost publishing houses declared the other day that any reputable publisher will cheerfully transfer the copyright for a book to the author.

§ *Monumental Books Privately Printed.*

Every once in a while one comes across a very handsomely made book that has been "privately printed," an example of beautiful workmanship. A book, perhaps, which has no public interest whatever. A club, very likely, a literary society, or an historical or other association has mainly for the satisfaction of its own members wished to issue a volume of its history, a bibliography of the works in its domain, or a catalog of its collection. Its object has been in no degree commercial. Its aim has been to achieve in its little monument an effect of elegance or an air of dignity. And the commission for the work having been given into the hands of a "press" erudite in the subject of format, a distinguished thing has resulted. Printing and publishing concerns of intellectually aristocratic or æsthetic character (or pretensions) not infrequently call themselves presses. At any rate, in such a proceeding, of course, as that just outlined, a thoroughly dignified and honorable transaction has been consummated.

In the catalogs of dealers in rare books, first editions, "choice" volumes, and so on, one fre-

quently meets with "items" described as "privately printed," generally volumes of verses. And lovely bibelots some of these things are—dilettantish expressions of taste. Such books are made by honest, sensitive, sometimes distinguished artists in their craft. They have been engaged to do the work by authors not only sufficiently sophisticated to know their way about in the book world, but who as often as not are æsthetic in temperament to the point of disdaining to have a book of theirs manufactured by a "commercial" publishing house.

And then one finds around here and there a good many privately printed books of another class, volumes which make no particular pretense to beauty, volumes oftentimes of decidedly plebeian effect, but for whose existence there is perfectly reasonable justification. Someone may have desired to have made as a memorial, a book of the writings of a deceased relative or friend. If the world didn't need the book, neither did he make it for the world. And if he was overcharged for the manufacture of the volume, his love has been more generous than he knows. Or there may somewhere have been a local demand for a certain class of literature which established

publishing houses of national scope could not be induced to supply, such as the story of a locality's traditions or incidents of its development. Such pieces of book making frequently are very patently the honest but sadly homely product of the local job printer. "Printed at the 'Journal' Office" is not a lofty, but a perfectly respectable imprint. And it frankly implies that nobody has been "stung."

§ *"Vanity Publishers" Prey Upon the Ignorant.*

Quite another matter we come to now; and a matter very carefully to be examined by the author striving to publish his first book. Margaret Deland, on joining the Authors' League of America in 1913, wrote, in a letter to the league: "I admit that there are dishonest publishers, just as there are possibly——possibly!——dishonest authors; but I, personally, have never met any. My experience of some twenty-five years has brought me in contact only with a set of very high-minded, very honorable, and even generous men." Mrs. Deland had no temptation toward any but the first-rate sort of publishing house. In that same year, in an article in "The Atlantic" George Platt Brett, president of the Macmillan

Company, referred to "those unscrupulous and dishonest publishers which have been a disgrace to the trade at times." The number of such pseudo-publishers has not grown less since then. And the number of their victims undoubtedly has steadily and greatly increased. A recent issue of a little magazine published in Chicago and interested in "private book production" asserts that the volume of privately published books put out each year is enormous.

Unfortunately the unknown author frequently "would give anything in the world" to have his book published, is willing to make almost any sacrifice. He will not take No from those callous big publishing houses. He begins to conceive the notion that their main idea is to get out of publishing the manuscripts sent to them. Whereas, of course, they are just as eager to get something to publish as he is to have his own book published. And then, indeed, do not the publishers nearly all admit themselves that his work has much merit? Mention has been made more than once in this book of the dangers to the unsophisticated writer of misinterpreting the usual rejection slips of legitimate publishers. Their soft-soap wording

does much, alas! to pave the way for the business of pickpocket and holdup publishing.

§ *What "Come on" Letters Lead To.*

The author we now have in our eye is an inconspicuous person who may have been fortunate enough (or unfortunate enough) to sell perhaps one story or one poem to some minor magazine. He receives right out of the sky, so to say, what among the informed in these matters is known as a "come on" letter. Under an impressive letter head, terminating in the word "Publisher," he (addressed by name) is told that this company is "on the lookout for a few unusually good book manuscripts to add to our winter list." Further, something like this:

> We shall therefore be glad to examine anything that you may care to submit at this time.
> Our readers will report promptly on whatever manuscripts you may offer and we trust we may soon have the pleasure of receiving some of your work for consideration.

Beneath the signature is typed "Editorial Department." Our much rejected author is enormously flattered. He sends on his manuscript book. Negotiations may proceed in any one of a

number of ways. Let us follow through one of them which, as the August, 1915, issue of the "Bulletin" of the Authors' League observes, "illustrates strikingly the patience with which the iniquitous publisher stalks his prey."

§ *"Liberal Offers" and Modifications.*

The author has submitted his manuscript with a view to securing publication at the publisher's expense. As usual in such cases, the firm writes him to this effect: "Our readers have reported favorably on 'Hills and Dales' and they have recommended its publication." But for one reason or another the firm cannot undertake to publish the book at its own expense. Probably: "Conditions in the book market at present are such that it is impossible to offer you any terms that would not involve some advance on your part." But: "Please do not take this as being in any way a reflection on the merits of your manuscript from a literary standpoint." Then "an extremely liberal offer" is made to publish at the author's expense. In "The Publishers' Weekly" for August 27, 1921, appeared a list that had recently been compiled of book production costs made for the head of a large publishing house to

serve as a guide in estimating the relation of figures of that time to those of five years before. These figures, available to anyone, prove exactly how outrageous are the "liberal offers" of the "come on" publishers.

The terms proposed happen to be beyond the reach of this author. It is not long before he receives another letter. The editorial department is "very much interested" in his work (or something like that) and is "therefore trying to induce our business manager to offer you the following modification in our terms." The modified terms are remarkable. They are apt to provide that the author may pay his eight or nine hundrd dollars in instalments covering a period of say five months. He is, perhaps, to receive the "total proceeds" from the sale of the first five hundred copies of the book. As additional inducements he is likely to be offered twenty-five copies free, to be relieved of the expense of copyrighting (something like a dollar and a half), and the publisher sometimes is even willing to prepare at his own expense "a special cover to consist of a fine illustration."

Numerous devices are employed by the "vanity publisher" to lead the innocent author on toward

becoming famous in his own eyes and those of his friends. Sometimes "a fine descriptive Folder" is proposed, to contain "an Order Blank to be circulated among bookbuyers, dealers, jobbers and also to lists of your personal friends (to be supplied by you)." This folder will be "beautifully printed (see sample enclosed)." And: "You will therefore kindly send us at once a brief synopsis of your book in your own words (to be elaborated and perfected by our editors), enclosing also your photograph if you wish it used; together with the remittance named, and we will go ahead full speed." Nothing is said to indicate that the circular in question is to be devoted exclusively to the author's book.

§ *Suggestions of Large Profits.*

The "come on" publisher lures his prey with suggestions of large profits—ambitious and inexperienced writers are invited to take advantage of a great opportunity. His lingo, altered to pertain to various forms of current literature, is that of the wild cat operator in oil or undeveloped mineral deposits. He knows that the book he obtains, in point of fact, can have no popularity. What incentive is there for him ever to market

a single copy? The money put up by the author pays for the printing and binding of the book, with a handsome profit to the publisher, even if it never leaves his cellar. The author receives a number of copies, and possibly a few are offered for review. The only sales of the book are made through the author's own efforts. And there the matter ends.

§ *Ironclad Contracts Protect the Dishonest Publisher.*

The contracts of publishers of this class usually are ironclad (always against the interests of the author). Care is taken to avoid absolute misrepresentation of fact. And the author finds himself, at the end, not only very much out of pocket, but disappointed, disheartened, and without any remedy at law. Where a written contract is made the author's rights are strictly limited to the promises the publishers set forth in the contract. Antecedent or contemporaneous promises or predictions form no part of the agreement; nor do the circulars and advertisements of the publishers.

Once in a blue moon a flimflam publisher gets hold of a book which turns out to be a real "find." There was a notable case in 1909. An author

paid a "come on" concern to publish a book which became surprisingly popular. A well-known magazine editor in New York, at that time literary editor of a Chicago newspaper, took a special interest in the author, and suggested to him that he buy in the rights from the publisher and have a reputable firm publish a new edition of the book. The author, before the termination of negotiations in the matter, offered as much as several thousand dollars more than several thousand dollars, for the rights to the book which had cost the publisher nothing—and the publisher refused to sell them.

Sometimes the "come on" publisher elaborately disguises his game. In 1919 a good many uncynical authors were favored with a most plausible sounding circular, which beguilingly set forth the great advantages to "the young writer, with his first acceptance, as well as to the veteran author," of avoiding the meagre royalties of the average publishing house and of enjoying "fully half the profits derived from the sales." The circular of this company stated that "the entire expense of publication is borne by us," that they had "financed the publication of more than one hundred volumes by obscure authors," that "the

authors paid us nothing to effect the publication of these books." In fact, they protested too much for any but the most unwary who, however, found when it came to signing the contract that "half the profits" was contingent upon a prepayment of an alleged *half* of the cost. Then there were seldom, if ever, any profits to divide—with the author. In short, again the publisher made his money out of the author, instead of the reader. That is one example of the "co-operative" plan of publishing.

§ *Other Schemes for Co-operative Publishing.*

In that case the author *could* have the happiness of buying his own book. At about that time there was another pseudo-publisher who merely "accepted" the manuscripts of would-be authors (not to speak of their checks) and then wrote wonderful letters of explanation in lieu of printing the books. But it came about that he went out of business. Another interesting idea in co-operative publishing came out of Bridgeport, Connecticut, a couple of years ago. A sale of shares of capital stock in the company to authors or prospective authors was proposed. The prospectus stated that this scheme provided "an open

door to the world of letters and secured an unobstructed avenue to the universe of thought." Also that the "benefits offered to new authors amount to salvation."

A curiously in-and-out sort of fly-by-night publishing enterprise cropped up a few years ago. In the classified columns of a regular magazine was placed this advertisement: "WANTED—Short Stories, Articles, Poems for new magazine. We pay on acceptance; offers submitted. Send prepaid with return postage. Handwritten MSS. acceptable."

Then followed an address. The story of what happened when an author sent a manuscript in response to this advertisement was told in "The Writer," the Boston magazine for literary workers, issue of (or near) March, 1919. Briefly it was this. The author received a letter from the "Mgr. Mss. Dept." of the magazine. Across the top of the stationery was spread as the several addresses of the magazine: "New York—London—Washington." Headquarters appeared to be in Washington. The telephone of the "Editorial Rooms" in that city was listed as one number; that of the "General Offices" as another.

The writer of the letter said that "while this is

not suited to our magazine, I am not sending it back with the usual rejection slip." He hoped the author would not think it "too presumptuous" for him to "offer a suggestion." This was that he "edit" the manuscript, and for a small fee, to "help cover expenses," aid the author in placing it "with a number of publications whom I know have purchased a similar type of MS. in the past." He delicately implied that the manuscript might be sold for more than twenty dollars, in which case he would expect a ten per cent. commission.

The upshot of the matter turned out to be that the "Mgr. Mss. Dept." of this magazine was working under a string of addresses in some half dozen cities as magazine editor, literary agent, and book publisher, doing business back and forth with himself. His so-called magazines, four in number, were used as "feeders" to entice to the book publishing counter "prospects" who had not been caught by the out-and-out bids to aspiring writers of books. Of practical experience in book publishing it was shown he had none. The telephone companies in several of the cities where he represented himself as having offices knew him not. On the stationery of one of his enterprises

he listed an array of distinguished "references," authors of note. When communicated with by the Authors' League as to the matter these gentlemen each and all replied that they had never heard of the fellow.

This young man's meteoric career was unfeelingly cut short by the Postmaster General. Every now and then one of these bogus publishers actually violates the law. In his eagerness he oversteps the line and flatly procures money under false pretenses. Others more cautiously keep inside that line and do far more harm.

There has been no intention whatever in this chapter of implying that the only publishing houses with which it is safe and desirable for an author to deal are the great publishing houses of long established position. Indeed, there are sometimes reasons why it is an advantage for an author to have his book in the hands of a house with a relatively small list. And because a publishing house is young certainly is no reason why it may not be an excellent one. But when a publisher is reputable this can readily be ascertained.

The "moral" is, when publishing a book at your own expense, *watch your step.*

## VII

### MARKETING AND PUBLISHING PLAYS

MARKETING the manuscript of a play is quite a different job from marketing the manuscript of a work of fiction. In the first place, book publishers encourage all writers to submit manuscripts, and assure them that their work will receive careful attention. We have seen in other chapters of this book how book publishers employ a staff for the very purpose of reading solicited and unsolicited manuscripts. Theatrical producers do not encourage all and sundry to submit plays. In fact a number of producers refuse positively to look at an unsolicited play manuscript. Most play producers apparently have a pretty good idea of just what they want. Instead of searching through a mass of solicited and unsolicited material with the hope of finding something for their purpose, they are likely to order what they want from playwrights who they believe can supply it.

But there is no lack of demand for plays. "There is a greater demand for plays today than ever before," declared one manager the other day; and a play broker said: "The managers, every one, are eager for good plays." In spite of this, the managers undoubtedly make it hard for the unknown playwright to have his play read.

§ *Treatment Accorded Play Manuscripts.*

A director recently was heard to say that it is no unusual thing for unsolicited manuscripts to knock around the average manager's office for months without receiving the slightest attention. The story goes that Sardou's first produced play, "The Students' Tavern," received its reading because the manager of the Odeon, on leaving the theatre with the leading actress, happened to turn over the heap of plays awaiting reading in his office. The actress got a glimpse of Sardou's neat, clear handwriting and it attracted her attention immediately. She picked up the manuscript and read it.

One reason why managers hesitate to encourage the sending in of plays is because of lawsuits. An inexperienced writer will submit a

manuscript to a certain manager. Some months later the writer will receive his manuscript back with a rejection slip. Three or four years later the writer will see a play produced by this same manager. The play will have a theme, or a scene, something similar to the play the writer submitted and had rejected. The writer jumps to the conclusion that the manager stole his play during the months in which he was supposed to be considering it. The writer then proceeds to take the matter into the courts.

Of course, there have been times when managers have actually stolen plots in this manner. But such a thing rarely happens today, certainly never in a reputable theatrical manager's office. Yet it is surprising to learn of the number of lawsuits that are still brought against managers by unknown writers who have submitted unsolicited play manuscripts. Every writer of plays should remember that in order to prove that a manager has taken his plot, he must prove that the manager has actually read the play.

§ *Submitting Plays Direct to Managers.*

What are the various methods of submitting play manuscripts? First: direct to managers.

The only way to submit a play to a manager would seem to be to obtain an introduction to one. It should be a real, honest-to-goodness introduction from some one who knows the manager personally. The author should tell the manager his story, who he is, what he has done, what his play is about, why he believes this manager above all others will be interested in the play, and so on. And then ask him whether or not he would care to read the play. If the manager says yes, it is highly probable that he will read it himself, although he may turn it over to one of his professional readers first. If he says no, he will probably tell the author quite frankly why he is not interested. One finds that the theatrical managers and producers are more frank with their authors than are editors and publishers.

Or, the author may write to a manager and tell him about himself, the theme of his play, how he happened to write it, why he believes it will appeal to the manager, and ask him if he may submit it. The author should be sure to state the theme of his play, the number of acts and *scenes,* the size of the cast, and the length of time it requires for acting.

To send in to a manager the manuscript of a play unsolicited is a rather hopeless proceeding.

§ *Play Brokers and Their Methods.*

Play brokers manage their business in very much the same way as literary agents, some of them charging various fees for reading, typing, criticising, or revising play manuscripts while others are paid a certain percentage of the royalty received on the plays which they actually sell. Many of the best known literary agencies have "play departments" that handle the dramatic rights to the novels, short stories, and other works of their clients. As a general rule the larger play brokers and play departments of literary agencies hesitate to consider play manuscripts from inexperienced writers. One play broker made the statement that of six hundred plays received in the course of a year perhaps ten, not more, were kept for circulation among managers and producers.

It is the play brokers business to keep in close touch with the needs and plans of the various managers and leading actors, and frequently a manager will ask a broker to assist him in finding a particular kind of play which he is desirous of

producing. It may be well to state that there are, of course, some dishonest play brokers. Against these the inexperienced playwright should be warned.

§ *Actors as MSS. Readers.*

Plays may be submitted to leading actors in the same manner as they are submitted to managers—at a personal meeting, after first writing for permission to submit the manuscript, and unsolicited. But the playwright should be convinced that his play is particularly well suited for the actor to whom he submits it. He should be familiar with the plays in which the actor has appeared, and he should have seen and studied the actor's technique. An excellent example of the kind of letter not to write an actor when submitting a play follows. It was written by a young woman who had spent several years of work with a correspondence school course for playwrights. The play was her first finished production. She wrote: "I have never been outside of Blanktown and as we have no theatre here I have never witnessed a professional play. However, I know I have the dramatic sense and a creative imagination, and I believe my past two

years of study has brought me up to the point where I am capable of turning out acceptable material. Of course, I have never seen you act and I am not sure that my play, 'Steeple Johnnie,' is just the kind of thing you do; but I am sure you will read the play and then perhaps recommend it to some one you know to be looking for this sort of thing."

If one is not accustomed to see professional productions in the theatre the chances very greatly are that he will never write successful plays. Unless, of course, he is a genius. In theatrical circles it is everywhere agreed that it is necessary for one to have some first class knowledge of the theatre in order to write a real play. Although, it might be mentioned, there is a tendency not to place extreme emphasis upon the idea of technique. One of the best established play brokers in New York holds that every successful play recently produced here has broken at least three of the recognized rules of technique.

§ *Theater Guilds and Amateur Productions.*

A fourth way in which plays are submitted is to amateur organizations and professional guilds, such as The Theatre Guild, The Inter-Theatre

Arts, Incorporated; The Provincetown Players, and other such bodies. One is required to be a member of some of these organizations in order to submit his plays to them.

A procedure not uncommonly employed is for the author with no foothold in the professional theatre to produce his play himself. This is a method very uncertain of wider results. However, if you have a play and do not know what to do with it, being unable, for one reason or another, to place it by means of one of the four other methods, the course is open to you to organize an amateur company of your own to give a performance of the play in your own or a nearby city. Your city or town may already have a dramatic club, in which case it would be well for you to first ask this organization to present the play. The newspaper reviews of the production may then be sent out to various managers and actors with a letter asking them if they would care to read the play manuscript.

The trouble with this method as a plan for carrying a play to the established theatre is that the local newspapers are, as a rule, far too effusive in praising amateur productions and local "playwrights." Their comments are apt to be so

exceedingly eulogistic that they won't "mean anything" to a manager or an experienced actor.

§ *Cost of Putting On Plays.*

Before submitting a play manuscript the author should have some idea of the situation with which a manager is confronted. In the first place, the producer must invest a sum ranging anywhere from $10,000 upward in each play that he presents. As much as $25,000 would not misstate the amount frequently invested. He considers, therefore, that he must feel reasonably sure that the plays that he accepts are worth, in box office receipts, at least $10,000 a week.

These figures make an interesting comparison with the expenses of book publishing. A book publisher can finance a book on from $500 to $1,000. If from three to five thousand people buy a book, the book will just about pay for itself; but it is not unreasonable to suppose that more than 15,000 people must buy tickets for a play before the producer recovers his original investment.

The cost of putting a play "on" today has greatly increased. Royalties, one gathers, have decreased in the past four years; but wages in

connection with the theatre are in some cases double those of five years ago, transportation charges for scenery, and what not, are almost prohibitive. Add to these matters a consideration of the salaries of the actors and actresses, the cost of the scenery, costumes and properties, the advertising, rent of the theatre, and the like, and one can come near to appreciating the risk of play producing. A play that demands elaborate scenery, costumes and stage effects, has practically no chance of acceptance today unless it has been ordered for some particular theatre like the Hippodrome or for some particular purpose. Even the Hippodrome productions are far less elaborate than they were four years ago.

§ *Number of Yearly Productions.*

Another thing to be considered in contemplating the career of a playwright is the number of plays produced. Aside from all the short stories, novelettes and novels that are published in the magazines and newspapers, between six and ten thousand books are published in a single year in the United States. The total number of plays produced in New York City in a single years is not over two hundred and fifty. Perhaps in all

the United States four or five hundred plays are produced in a year; certainly not more.

In one of Mr. Tarkington's recently published stories a young playwright comes to feel that everyone connected with the production of his play has had more of a hand in its authorship than he had. It is, of course, true that managers, in their eagerness to get just the things they consider right, will often accept a play and then pay out considerable sums of money to have it edited and put into shape. An observation sometimes heard is that no "first plays" are produced exactly as they were written.

A play may be edited and changed before it goes into rehearsals. Whether it is or not, it will in all likelihood be changed in many respects during rehearsal. Excisions, additions, interpolations, are made by the manager, the stage director, by the stars, and sometimes at the suggestion of the other actors. Experienced playwrights are sometimes called in to help whip a first play into shape. When a play by an experienced playwright goes into rehearsals the changes are usually made by the author, although in many instances at the suggestion of the manager, director, or star.

§ *The Playwright's Royalty and Contract.*

Plays should never be sold outright. They are usually produced on a royalty basis. The author is paid a cash bonus as advance royalty, when the manuscript is accepted. He then receives a percentage of the gross box-office receipts. This percentage varies in accordance with the reputation of the playwright and the amount of capital at the disposal of the producer.

The producer, when he accepts the manuscript, agrees to produce the play before a certain date, say within six months after the contract is signed. If the manager fails to produce the play by the date specified the author regains control of all rights to the play. This is an important part of the contract. Many good plays have been bought by managers simply to keep them out of the hands of rival managers and they have never been produced. Also, the producer agrees to produce the play for a certain period each year after the first performance. If he fails to do this the agreement may be considered at an end and the rights to the play are returned to the author.

The author's royalty may be anywhere from two to ten per cent. of the gross receipts during

the play's run. The author should insist upon a percentage of the *gross* receipts and *not* of the net receipts. A fair royalty would be five per cent. of the first $5,000 receipts and ten per cent. of anything over that amount. The English rights to a play by an American playwright were contracted for the other day on the following royalty basis:

5 % of the first $5,000 gross receipts.
7½% of the next $1,000 gross receipts.
10 % of all over $6,000 gross receipts.

One other way of getting a play before the public and attracting to it the attention of producers is by having it published. The attitude of book publishers today toward plays we'll come to presently. Some magazines publish a one act play in every issue. The play manuscript is submitted to magazine editors and book publishers in the regular manner, described in the preceding chapters. If it is accepted and published, play producers and managers will probably see some notices of it, which, if they are favorable, may entice the producers and managers to get a copy of the play and read it. Free copies may be sent by the author to managers and actors who he

thinks might be interested in the play. "He Who Gets Slapped" was published in "The Dial." In this way it was brought to the attention of The Theatre Guild.

§ *No Demand for "Closet Dramas."*

Some plays, known as "closet dramas," are written expressly for magazine and book publication. Sir Adolphus William Ward said of these "literary plays": Though the term literary drama is sometimes used of works kept apart from the stage, it is in truth a misnomer, since, properly speaking, no drama is such until it is acted." If you want your play produced write it to be acted and not simply to be published. That is the "word" of the manager, the actor and the play broker. A drama to be a drama must be acted. Another suggestion: if your plays cannot be acted, don't write plays; try stories. Unactable plays, now and then, have been found to make excellent stories.

A story is current of a play which the author could get no manager interested in, while it was in the form of a play manuscript. He recast his material in the form of a story, and had it accepted by a magazine. Here its "dramatic pos-

sibilities" enlisted the attention of a theatrical producer. The story was re-written for the stage, and as a play attained notable success.

Authors seeking to publish plays in book form should note, by an examination of the lists of various publishing houses, that some publishers, a few, are much more interested in volumes of this character than are the others. Those, naturally, are the ones first to be approached.

§ *Publishing Plays.*

The attitude at present of book publishers toward plays, as expressed by several of those most concerned with the matter, seems to be this: Closet plays are not any longer wanted. If a play is not written to be produced the author has little chance of seeing it published. Generally publishers do not want full-length plays—plays occupying an evening—unless they are by authors already well established. And such authors not infrequently, as in the cases of Galsworthy and Barrie, have become established through works in other fields.

After a play has had a successful stage production—run .at least two months—the author may offer it to a publisher with a reasonable chance of

publication. In a few cases plays of highly exceptional literary merit, like "Swords" and "The Detour," have been accepted by publishers though they have failed on the stage; but such cases are extremely rare. One of the best ways for an author who has not arrived in the metropolitan theatres to get a hearing with a publisher is for him to have his plays mimeographed and produced locally in one or two little theatres before submitting them. His press clippings may help the confidence of the publisher. "The only test for plays is the theatre. If a play doesn't work in the theatre it won't work elsewhere."

Authors who submit to publishers full-length plays should generally not make them more than a hundred pages in length. "Macbeth" is but ninety-eight pages, in a class-room edition. Pageants are very seldom wanted by a publisher. They are usually issued by their authors in mimeograph, frequently through the publishing branch of the Y. M. C. A. The best field for published plays is the one-act play. Two or three publishing houses make a feature of issuing them separately, one play at a time. Most one-act plays, however, especially those by new authors, are issued in volumes usually of half a dozen, though

the number may vary from three to eight or ten. They are also, of course, issued in anthologies, in volumes containing sometimes as many as fifty plays. Much latitude in taste and subject may be found in such plays; but as more than four hundred schools and colleges are producing them, the "clean play" stands by far the better chance of publication.

§ *Symbolic Plays Must Have Human Interest.*

Indisputably, some very fine one-act plays of a symbolic type have recently been isued, but their central themes, nevertheless, have been intensely emotional and human. Publishers assert that about the most hopeless material that comes in under the name of plays are the shapeless things that their authors call symbolic plays. They may have plenty of symbolism, it is remarked, but no human interest; and a play without human interest is—well, not usually regarded with enthusiasm in editorial offices.

Book publishers quite support theatrical managers and producers in the opinion that unless a writer is familiar with the stage he had better not attempt to write plays at all. Not because the writer is hedged about by stiff formalities, but be-

cause he is considerably limited by the mechanical possibilities of the stage, especially of an amateur stage.

As in writing any kind of literature, the editorial authorities again assert, the first essential for the embarking playwright is a study of the best examples.

And, if possible, a contraction of the habit of visiting a drama bookshop is strongly recommended.

# VIII

## CONTRACTS AND ROYALTIES

DIRECTLY after the manuscript of a book has been accepted for publication the author usually receives from the publishers two copies of a formal document. This instrument is a contract, or (as it is sometimes labelled) "Memorandum of Agreement"—made (the preamble perhaps recites) this twenty-sixth day of June, 1922, between John Doe, of New York City, hereinafter called the Author, and (let us say) GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY, of New York, hereinafter called the Publishers, whereby it is mutually agreed: . . .

In most cases the publisher's contract is a printed form. Sometimes it is merely typewritten. Generally it is a rather lengthy affair. When the contract reaches the author it bears the signature of the publisher. If the terms of the contract are satisfactory to the author, he should sign, in the place provided for his autograph,

both of the copies sent to him. And then return one copy to the publisher, keeping the other himself.

§ *Gentlemen's Agreements.*

There is no standard form of contract for publishing works in book form. Each publisher has his own contract form. A number of the smaller publishers, it seems, still rely upon "gentlemen's agreements" which consist merely of an exchange of letters. These letters state little more than that the publisher agrees to publish the work; that he agrees, also, to pay the author so much at certain times; and that the author agrees to turn over the work to the publisher for publication according to the stated terms. The details of these transactions are settled verbally.

Although more often than not the publishers who accept books according to "gentlemen's agreements" are thoroughly honest and invariably look after the interests of their authors, it must be admitted that "gentlemen's agreements" are no longer businesslike, and, in fact, give the author no legal protection. A man of any experience in affairs would not rent a house simply on the exchange of letters in which the owner or

his agent agrees to rent the house in return for a certain sum of money and the man agrees to occupy the house and pay the stated sum.

When an author publishes a book, he becomes in a sense a partner of the publisher, investing his time and creative talent jointly with the publisher's business talent and capital. It is his business to see to it that all of his interests in the venture are protected, just as the publisher is sure to see to it that all of his interests are protected. Every contract between an author and a publisher ought, of course, to be as fair for the author as it is for the publisher.

§ *Taking it for Granted.*

The creative worker in the arts, however, has proverbially never by the very nature of his work been particularly attentive to obtaining from the commercial world the full compensation due to him for his contribution to progress or to the amenities of existence. Then many writers have the type of mind which finds legal documents quite formidable reading, and to them a publisher's contract seems about as comprehensible as a railway time-table. They are inclined to "take it for granted" that the thing is "all right,"

and let it go at that. And frequently one about to publish his own book is so carried away by elation that he would be likely to blindly sign his own death warrant without looking at it.

Read your contract. Any respectable publisher would want you to. Recently the author of a book which turned out to be one of the most successful humorous volumes of the year was obviously so bewildered and bored when his contract was handed to him that his publisher almost forcibly restrained him in a chair while he read it to him. And read your contract carefully. Not long ago a man who had been for a number of years in the editorial branch of the publishing business upon looking over the contract for a book of his own which he was about to have published understood the paper to say that in certain circumstances the royalty was to be ten per cent. per copy, when, in fact, the contract read ten cents per copy. And his misconception of the terms clearly stated led him to expect twice the amount of profit proposed.

§ *Slipshod Agreements.*

Sometimes a publishing house which has two lists of books, each one distinct in its character

and problems from the other, feels that it is advisable to have two forms of contract. This is the case, for example, with Henry Holt and Company, which has one form of contract for its educational books and another, slightly different, for its fiction and general list. Usually, however, a publisher has but one form of contract. This is used by the most prominent writers published by the house and by those whose maiden achievement in book form is about to appear. But while certain prominent authors may use the same basic form they are likely not to do so without having made a number of changes which alter the complexion of the document considerably. The point here is this: If an author is not in complete agreement with each and all of the terms of his contract as it is presented to him, he should not rely on a mere verbal statement or an informal letter from his publisher as a way of revising it. In this way slipshod agreements sometimes are made that later are the cause of infinite trouble owing to the lack of a definite record of the understanding arrived at. In the world of purely commercial business, of course, both parties to a transaction are intent upon fixing in writing as accurately as may be the terms of agreement and

every attempt is made to cover all possible contingencies in such manner that no opening for future discussion or disagreement may be left. And an author who will follow such a course is being as fair with his publisher as with himself.

There is, as has been said, no standard form of contract employed in common among publishers. Latter-day developments in the publishing world have caused the contracts now in use with some publishing houses to seem somewhat old-fashioned. Twenty years ago the novel which stood dramatization was extremely rare. And until recently the subject of motion picture rights was hardly considered at all. Today the matter of proprietorship of all the various "rights" which may attach to the work of a writer has become highly complicated. There are first serial rights, second serial rights, book, music, dramatic, movie, foreign and translation rights.

During the past seven or eight years the Authors' League of America has made repeated attempts to work out a form which would meet the just demands of the publishers and would at the same time adequately recognize the claims of the author. The problems arising from a consideration of authors' and publishers' contracts

are many and fairly complex. It was found difficult to generalize and still more difficult to establish a satisfactory and workable standard. In its "Bulletin" for February, 1919, a spokesman for the League said that for one reason or another none of these attempts had been successful. The nearest approach to success, he continued, was a form evolved the year before with the help of a number of friendly publishers which provided a skeleton for an agreement but which left open all such questions as ownership of copyright, secondary rights, percentage of royalty, et cetera. The League continued to try to reach some conclusive decision and further conferred with some of the representative publishers. In its "Bulletin" for January, 1922, (which is probably on file at most public libraries) it published "A Standard Form of Publishing Contract, Approved by the Executive Committee of the Authors' League," preceeded by this statement: "As a 'maximum' contract this form is planned to include all those clauses and stipulations which any author might urge at one time or another for the full protection of his work. Practically every clause in this contract has at one time or another

been included in an actual agreement arrived at between author and publisher."

§ *A Specimen Contract.*

This tentative, specimen contract will, of course, give anyone interested a detailed view of the multitudinous matters considered in publishers' contracts. Whether or not it is possible, however, to construct a contract which could serve, with equal justice to all, the varying character of the business of a majority of publishers remains problematical. A prominent publisher recently adopted the League's form of contract, but with certain variations which seemed to him imperative owing to special conditions in his business, and which, after consideration of the matter were approved by the Executive Committee of the Authors' League. And the author of a "first book" who is over zealous in the matter of his "rights" and dues is likely to find that, if he is going to get it out at all, it will be necessary for him to publish his book himself. It is a highly advisable thing, of course, for an author to take an intelligent interest in the whole matter of the publication of his book, and to analyse each clause of his contract so that he clearly understands

what is said in it; but when dealing with a publisher of reputable reputation the likelihood of his being deliberately "done" in any way is slight. This is said on the authority of a man who has been a member of the editorial staffs of four of the leading publishing houses in New York. It will do the author no harm, however, to investigate a bit as to whether the publisher is one of thoroughly reputable reputation. Such a thing is not altogether unknown as a lawyer being required to collect royalties from a house of outwardly flourishing character.

A publisher's terms, of course, vary with the character of different books, and the basic form of his contract is filled in accordingly. The royalty on a book of verse, for instance, is considerably less than that on a work of fiction. And phrases or clauses which do not pertain to the volume being arranged for are (when the contract is in printed form) struck out. Every now and then matter applying peculiarly to a particular book is written into the stock form of a contract. For example, say, the royalty to be paid on copies of a book sold by agreement between author and publisher in combination with subscriptions for a magazine, as distinct from the royalty on copies

sold through the regular trade channels. The royalty paid on any one type of book by an author unable to dictate his own terms is approximately the same among all well-established publishers, or at least does not vary much. On regular sales the percentage of royalty is calculated on the retail price of the book. The number of free copies of his book which an author is entitled to receive differs a little with various houses. With some the rule is six copies, with others eight, or ten, or, maybe, twelve. Additional copies may be purchased by the author, for his own use (that is, not for him to sell), at a liberal discount from the list price.

§ *Advances Against Royalties.*

A cash advance against royalties is frequently made by the publishers when contracting with the more successful authors. This is usually payable either upon publication or half upon the delivery of the completed manuscript and the remainder upon publication. Within the past few years some publishers have been offering the alternative of paying royalties on advance sales made before the date of publication in lieu of a cash advance. The author here, of course, takes

a chance of early getting more money or less money than by the plan of a stated cash advance. Publishers commonly do not pay more than half of the regular rate of royalty on export sales.

§ *New Editions.*

Many contracts provide for the publication of a cheap edition, some specified time (perhaps two years) "after date of publication of said work." Usually, in the case of books of fiction thus re-issued, the publisher sells the right to bring out a cheap edition to a firm of "reprint publishers," paying the author on such royalty sales what is generally considered a fair proportion of the amount received from the second publishers. Successful works of non-fiction not infrequently are later issued in cheaper forms by the original publisher. Or a publisher may decide to publish an expanded edition of some popular book, maybe with the addition of illustrations. In all cases where a latter edition of a price different from the first is not contemplated and specifically provided for in the original contract for the book, the author should, in the interests of his heirs or assigns, obtain a new contract, or some formal memorandum, covering the busi-

ness conditions as between himself and his publisher upon which the new edition is published. It is, in certain aspects, a new book.

As to the time provided in a book contract for rendering statements of accounts and for making payments. A typical clause follows: "The first statement shall not be rendered until six months after date of publication and thereafter statements shall be rendered semi-annually, in the months of February and August; settlement to made in cash, four months after date of statement."

Some houses require the author to apply for statements. In most cases they are sent out automatically by the publishers. The statements of some houses show in detail the number of copies printed, the number sold in the United States, the number sold in Canada, the number sold in England, the number spoiled, the number given away for review, and the number on hand. Other houses deem it sufficient to state the number of copies sold. The custom of a four months' delay in royalty payments has become rather firmly established. This arose from the fact that publishers are accustomed to grant long payment terms to the retailers. They commonly do not

collect for sales until from three to six months after the goods are shipped.

§ *Royalty Accounts.*

The problem of the proper authentication of royalty accounts has long vexed both author and publisher. A few of the leading publishing houses have adopted the plan of having their royalty statements attested by certified public accountants. But (and the management of the Authors' League is not exactly reluctant to "speak out" in its attitude toward publishers) a leading article in an issue of The Authors' League "Bulletin" for 1919 states that: "Experience and careful investigation have shown that the well-known publishers, *almost* without exception, may be relied upon to render truthful statements."

§ *Options.*

It often happens that, when contracting for the publication of a book, the publishers stipulate for the first refusal of the next book or maybe two books by the author. The advantage or otherwise to the author of such an arrangement depends on the circumstances of the particular

case. The terms on which such an option are arranged vary, but a specification of them may be valuable to the author. Sometimes, indeed, a publisher "signs up" with an author for an option on so many of his books to come as the next ten. There have even been cases wherein an author has agreed to give his publisher the first examination of all his work for the rest of his life. The meaning of this arrangement is that the publisher is at liberty to decline any book that the author may submit to him, after which decision the author is at liberty to place the book elsewhere, but the author is obligated to continue to submit first to this publisher anything else that he does. Instances have occurred where the publisher has agreed to take anything and everything that an author does. "But," said an author in one such case, "suppose that sometime I dump upon you some utterly punk stuff." "Then," replied the publisher, "I'd be sorry, for your sake as well as my own, but I'd publish the book."

§ *Flexible Agreements.*

Much insistence has been placed in this article upon the advisability for an author of having all possible contingencies provided for in his contract

and all matters of agreement "nailed down." And the idea of a "gentlemen's agreement" between author and publisher was not particularly commended. There are, however, conditions conceivable where a more or less flexible agreement might prove to be the better way. The unknown, or little known author struggling to get his book accepted *anywhere* may regard with wonderment what he feels to be the heavenly felicity of a man whose unwritten work a publisher seeks to acquire for years to come. But let us consider this situation: An author enters into a precise contract with a publisher to give him an option on anything in the form of a book he may write for a certain considerable period of time. (*a*) Sometime later he and the publisher fall out about some question of business (maybe it seems to the author that the publisher has made a number of strategic blunders in handling his work) or about some personal matter, and relations between them become decidedly strained. (*b*) Or the publisher dies and the author finds that he does not get on amicably with those who succeed him in the business. (*c*) Or the publishing house begins to decline in character, and the value of its imprint diminishes. (*d*) Or the publisher

gets into financial difficulties and the matter of his paying royalties promptly becomes precarious.

In the event of any one of the propositions designated *a, b* and *c,* what would be the result of a hard and fast contract binding the author to turn over book after book? His position certainly would not be an agreeable one. It might very probably be so provoking as to cause his work and career to suffer more than a bit. And his publishers would not be likely to be happy in the arrangement. The only way out of such an untenable situation would be for the publishers formally to release the author from his recorded agreement. This, presumably, by any house of character would sooner or later be done.

The hypothetical situation suggested above in the supposition marked *d* presents a nice ethical problem. It may be observed that a good many authors who have a very lively sense of the duty of the publisher toward themselves do not reveal any very active consciousness of lofty honor on their part toward their publishers. Though it should be added that charming relationships, where there is pronounced loyalty on both sides, are not absent from the publishing world.

§ *Personal Relationships.*

There have even been cases where the friendship of a publisher for an author has caused him to bear patiently for a long time with many business delinquencies of the latter, and to stand in somewhat the same relationship to him as that of a father constant in his regard for a somewhat erring son. But to return to the more ordinary course of things. A publisher (we'll say) has done the best he could for an author, and has served him well. He may have accepted his first book, in the days when the author almost despaired of *ever* finding a publisher. He has, it may be, carried along some of the author's books on a very thin gambling chance of any profit. By advertising and vigilant attention to publicity built up the author into a valuable "literary property." Then circumstances press upon him and his business inclines to move a bit haltingly.

It has been assumed in a general way by both parties to the relationship that the author would continue right along with this publisher; but he has not bound himself by contract to do so for any stated length of time. His books have come to be sought by other publishers in unquestion-

ably solid circumstances. Would he, however, in his heart feel altogether free to desert at a difficult moment the publisher who had so well stood by *him?*

Authors of a good deal of prominence could be named who simply and unselfishly have been very much devoted to their publishers. Sometimes an author becomes greatly attached to an editor with whom he has always dealt at the house which has been publishing his books. When, if it should so happen, this editor goes to another house the author goes with him, that is thereafter he places his books there. One of the most successful of American novelists, if not the most successful one, one time remarked apropos of this matter: "I follow *men,* not houses."

§ *Validity of Contracts.*

When a contract providing for the publication of a book has been signed by publisher (or one authorized to represent him) and author, it is as binding on both parties to the agreement as a contract in any other department of the business world. That is, it cannot be repudiated by one party to the transaction; it will stand in law. It is, in its minor way, analogous to a treaty be-

tween nations; and it could be made perilous for one to regard it as "a scrap of paper." Anybody, you'd think, would be aware of that. Well, it has sometimes happened that an author has, when opposed to some detail that has arisen, offered to return to the publisher his copy of the contract. What would an author say if, in like circumstances, a publisher suddenly announced that he was inclined to throw away *his* copy of the contract? A contract though can, of course, be dissolved by agreement between the signatory parties. Following the custom which is becoming more and more extended in the business world, an "arbitration clause" is frequently included in the form contracts of publishers. The advisability of such a clause is a matter of some controversy.

# IX

## QUESTIONS OF COPYRIGHT

THE subject of copyright as relating to the productions of an author is an exceedingly intricate one. To follow through in detail the whole subject would require a volume. Further than that, a number of questions in the matter still remain at issue, and nobody seems to know what may be the conclusive answer to them. In Section 280 of the Penal Code it appears that a layman is not permitted to give persons legal advice or to assist them in the legal phrasing and revision of contracts. It is, therefore, advisable for authors, when in difficulties about the matter, to consult an attorney for assistance in applying information obtained from lay sources.

§ *International Copyright.*

The fight for international copyright was long and hard and as far at least as our own country is concerned is still unfinished. Since the estab-

lishment of international copyright in 1891 the European market for American books has steadily improved. An important development in international copyright, as provided in the International Copyright Conventions, was the protocol which was added to the Berlin Convention on March 20, 1914. The report of Thorvald Solberg, the Register of Copyrights, dated July 6, 1917, contains a complete, authoritative and concise survey of international copyrights. Among other things the Register urged the necessity of changes in our Copyright Law which would enable the United States to enter the International Copyright Union. An article in the "Bulletin" of The Authors' League, issue of February, 1915, concludes thus: "It would be hard, indeed, to overestimate the importance of copyright legislation and the difficulty of arousing interest in it is much to be regretted, as are also the widespread indifference and ignorance in regard to the subject. Writers especially should be strongly interested in every new development and should take active part in the fight that is being carried on by some of the best-known New York publishers and by the Authors' League for fuller and freer protection of literary and artis-

tic material. There is no class, except perhaps the publishers, whose interests are so much affected by copyright legislation as authors."

§ *Copyright Reform.*

The American Publishers' Copyright League is an organization whose object is to work for domestic copyright reform and to seek to improve the situation and opportunities of American claimants to copyright abroad. Active in this direction, also, has been work done by the Incorporated Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers.

The World War seriously interfered with the international copyright relations of the United States. As a result of embargoes, irregularities in traffic conditions, and so on, many valuable international copyrights were lost owing to the impossibility for American citizens to comply with the formalities in foreign countries and for foreigners to comply with such formalities in the United States. The State Department was petitioned for the introduction of a bill in Congress which would make it possible to repair at least partially the havoc wrought by the war in the field of international copyright. One of the kinks

in the international copyright situation is that copyright through registry in Canada is not effective in England.

§ *Foreign Markets.*

British, Colonial and Canadian sales for American books are frequently quite substantial. If the American publisher has an English branch or close English connections he can usually be relied upon to take advantage of the opportunities offered in these fields. If he has not, and has not acquired by contract territorial rights to the book covering other countries, the author may deal directly with a British firm, or through an agent. In this connection it is important to take into consideration the requirements of the British Copyright Law in regard to simultaneous publication and also to bear in mind the fact that the English publishers almost invariably demand Colonial rights as well as British.

Many books by foreign authors have a great circulation over here; but comparatively few American books have any sale abroad, even in England, and those few are usually the work of our best-known and highest-priced authors. And these authors usually have the knowledge and

position to look after the foreign marketing of their work. So the bulk of the preceding several paragraphs may seem to be rather beside the point in the immediate case of the beginner author. Still it may serve as a very slender introduction to a subject which may concern him later on. And also some few "first books" have found their way to an export sale, and even (in rare instances) have been translated into foreign languages.

§ *United States Copyright.*

The first term of United States copyright for a book is twenty-eight years. A renewal term of equal length may be obtained making the entire possible term of United States copyright fifty-six years. The Government publishes sheets giving information concerning copyrights which are used for reference in the offices of publishing houses and which may be had by anyone upon request.

§ *Securing Registration.*

One of these pages is headed: "Library of Congress. Copyright Office. Application for

Number 35. Steps necessary to secure copyright registration in the United States under the act of March 4, 1909, as amended." To procure copyright for a bound book the printed form to be used is labelled, "APPLICATION FOR COPYRIGHT—BOOK NOW FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES." On the reverse side of this card is a form for an affidavit of American manufacture. The execution of this affidavit must be subsequent to the publication of the book. This is application "A1." If the work is a new edition or republished, the application to be used is "A2." These forms may be obtained from the Register of Copyrights, Washington, D. C., and are to be returned to him, accompanied by one dollar, statutory fee for registration and certificate. Also, at the same time, of the book named two complete copies "of the best edition *first published* on the date stated herein" are to be deposited with the Register of Copyrights. In the matter of plays not to be printed or bound the form used is: "D2. Application for Copyright—Dramatic Composition not Reproduced for Sale." And one complete copy of the script is deposited.

§ *Copyright Ownership.*

Few authors themselves go to the trouble of copyrighting their books. There is no reason why they should unless they are publishing the book themselves. The publishing house which has accepted a book nearly always arranges for the copyright. As matters stand, the publisher usually takes out the copyright in the name of his house. The subject of having the copyright in the name of the author was given some attention in the chapter of this book entitled "Publishing Your Own Book." And it might be useful for the reader here to look again at the question as treated there.

§ *By Products.*

The Authors' League of America advocates that everything an author has published be copyrighted in the name of the author. The author then has the power to sell the serial rights to a magazine, the book rights to a publishing house, the playwrights to a producer, and so on, without having to get permission for each transaction from a third party. The League's "Bulletin" reports the extreme opposite attitude as stated by

one directing publisher, who says: "The only satisfactory way is to place all rights, except the serial rights, in the hands of the publisher, and let him do the best he can by the author." This man's position is that while the writer who lives in New York and knows by experience the business side of his profession may dispose of his by-product to advantage, most authors with whom he deals do not belong to that class. His typical author lives somewhere in the Middle West, and is not in touch with those managers who deal with dramatic rights nor with those newspaper syndicates which handle the second serial rights. The publisher, being on the ground, and having experience in all these details of his business, finds himself in a better position to get the full value of the by-product. The greater number of the leading publishing houses, it is fairly safe to say, are willing to release most of the by-products to the author. In order, however, to protect "all rights" in his work an author when submitting a manuscript to a magazine or publisher for the first time may write something like this in his letter of transmission. This is a form used by one of the best known literary agents and apparently is acceptable to most publishers:

This manuscript is submitted with the understanding that if it is accepted for publication, the same shall be copyrighted by the Publisher, and all rights in said copyright (except such rights as may be acquired by agreement with the author) shall be held in trust for the benefit of the author or his assigns, and shall be reassigned to him or them upon demand.

§ *Motion Pictures, Translations, and Plays.*

Moving picture production in some instances yields a greater profit than the publication of the novel or story in print. The present copyright law, Arthur C. Train considers, appears to distinguish between dramatic rights and moving picture rights. Motion picture rights can be disposed of any time before or after publication. Motion picture rights have been sold for cash which would have returned vastly more if a continuing interest in the film had been secured. Scripts of motion pictures should be filed with the United States copyright department for protection of these versions of the original.

While it is, of course, a very flattering thing to be of such note and universal appeal as to be translated into a foreign language, the prices paid for translation rights are very low, rarely

exceeding one hundred to two hundred dollars. It is said to be extremely difficult to arrange for the publication of a translation on the royalty basis.

Plays, even if not published in book form, are performed in public. Therefore, as the essence of present copyright legislation is protection of material that is presented to the public, they are copyrightable. Book manuscripts, which do not require the provisions of the copyright law, are in the domain protected by common law.

Decisions of the courts have repeatedly been sought by authors in copyright troubles with magazine publication. And a good deal of a tangle has obtained in the matter. Sometimes the question has been raised as to whether copyright for a story was secured at all by its publication under a copyright notice containing only the magazine *proprietor's* name. The general copyright of a magazine covering first publication of a contributor's work only serves to protect other rights for the author. They may, however, be explicitly reserved by the author and an additional copyright in the author's name can be printed at the foot of the magazine page as a

further protection over and above the magazine blanket copyright notice.

§ *Serial Rights.*

There are still magazines that assume that they buy all rights for one payment. And unless the author has especially stipulated otherwise in his transaction with a magazine of this character, it holds that he cannot legally sell, say, the book rights to his novel without permission from the magazine in whose name it has been copyrighted. The magazine may undertake to demand a share in the book royalties for giving its permission to have the novel published in book form. On the other hand, "wise" authors have boldly insisted upon selling to magazines "only the serial rights" —and flattered themselves that their other rights remained well protected as their own property. But, an authority states, it has been held by the courts that (since one cannot protect by copyright what he does not own), the magazine which bought "only the serial rights" can copyright *only* those rights, and therefore, through the publication of the work all other rights lapse to the public. Or, rather, the courts would probably so rule in a suit at law. And there you are. It

should be said, however, that the better class magazines are coming more and more to the position of assigning the copyright of the author's work and all rights (except, of course, the serial rights which have been used) back to the author.

In the matter of collecting into a volume essays and short stories which have first been published in various first-class magazines, the author usually, in a note preceding the table of contents in the book, merely "gratefully acknowledges permission to reprint" from the editors of the publications in which the work first appeared. Now and then, he does not even bother to trouble the editors with a request for this permission, assuming that it would be freely and cordially given. Though the magazine *could* make a charge for granting this permission if it wanted to.

§ *Legal Opinions.*

The law as to the scope of magazine copyright was formulated in the judges' opinions in a decision handed down in 1910. The League first called public attention to the case in its "Bulletin" for April, 1913, in an article on "Copyright," by Arthur C. Train, Attorney for the

League. The Authors' Club (New York), for the benefit of its members, published in a leaflet what the League rather banteringly called a "digest" of the article. The leaflet read, in part:

> Briefly, these opinions are to the effect that a magazine copyright covers the matter contained in each number only to the extent to which such matter is the property of the magazine. It therefore follows that in the case of a story, of which only the magazine rights have been sold by the author, the magazine copyright leaves him absolutely unprotected in his dramatic and, theoretically at least, in his book rights. To save whatever he reserves, he must take copyright, also, in his own name, fulfilling the necessary formalities, such as paying a separate fee, depositing two copies in the Library of Congress, and seeing that his notice of copyright appears upon the story when published in the magazine.
>
> A simpler method is for the author to convey all his rights to the magazine, receiving back an obligation to retransfer to him, on demand, book, dramatic rights, etc. The point is that the magazine must have full ownership, when it takes out its copyright, in order to make that copyright generally effective.

It may be noticed that very famous authors, Kipling for example, not infrequently do have a line of copyright notice in their own name printed

at the bottom of the magazine page on which their work begins.

§ *Voucher Checks.*

Writers inexperienced in the business side of their work frequently are so elated at receiving a magazine publisher's check that they hardly look at it further than to note the amount for which it is drawn. With a glow of pride they endorse the glamorous instrument, and they are by so much richer than they were before. "The Dial," in 1917, with much vigor pointed out to the unsophisticated writer the advisability of his scrutinizing the fine print which may be on his check, just above the place for his signature. He cannot endorse the check without signing what is there presented as an agreement. Later he may have an opportunity to profitably dispose of the book rights, foreign rights, translation rights, dramatic rights, or film rights to the work for which, it may be, he has received from the magazine a pittance. The editor produces the cancelled check and shows him that he has disposed of all rights. Rex Beach one time wrote a keen little skit on this subject, in the form of a scenario

("founded on fact") and entitled, "It Happens Every Day."

A celebrated case at law, Dam *vs.* Kirke La Shelle, arose from the wording of the only piece of writing which passed between author and publisher. There were but seventeen words, omitting the date, to the paper, to which the author placed his name acknowledging receipt of eighty-five dollars "in full payment for" a certain story. After years of litigation the conclusion was reached by the United States Circuit Court of Appeals (with one judge out of three dissenting, however) that this receipt was evidence of a sale of the entire rights to the story.

Rights assigned to the author only by the editor of a magazine, it would appear, are invalid in law. The assignment must be signed by an officer of the corporation publishing the magazine. The assignment also must be recorded in Washington within ninety days of its execution.

## X

### PHOTOPLAY WRITING AND THE PHOTOPLAY MARKET

A SURVEY of the photoplay field leads one to believe that there is a deal of misinformation regarding the moving picture industry going the rounds, and that—perhaps because the moving picture producers have not over troubled themselves to correct false impressions—this misinformation has taken root in the minds of a great many people and appears to be growing rapidly. One who looks into this state of affairs will find that the most recurrent belief is that writing photoplays requires no special training or talent and is about the simplest method of acquiring a fortune.

"You see, I am just a school-girl, needing money," says a letter enclosed with a scenario, "and my English teacher thot mabe I could make some thru using my English comp's for photoplays so I sent you these two—the first two I've

ever sent outside of Pleasant Mountain." And another letter says: "I send you my first Photoplay and i am sure it will be All right it is very plain to me the business is thorally over done most of the photoplays are not worth much and they are filling up with anything i think my Scribble is much better than the average." And a third: "I have heard so much about the tremendous sums paid for photoplays I would like to take a shot at the Game. Please give me some idea of what a photoplay is. And what is a continuity? Am I writing anything like it?"

§ *Not an Easy "Game" for the Inexperienced.*

But the inexperienced writers who have taken "a shot at the Game" have not often, you will find, met with the instantaneous success they anticipated. An ambitious, persevering writer reports: "I would state that I have been *submitting* manuscripts to moving picture concerns for seven years. I HAVE NOT SOLD ONE. Of course I am going to do so SOME TIME. Further, following my high school training, wide travel (New York to Nagasaki and six years in regular army in the Islands), and TWO short story 'courses,' a regular reader of THE BOOKMAN, and bearing the

reputation of 'a story *telling* fool,' yet as I said before, I JUST CANNOT GET THEM TO STICK." A more discouraged individual complains: "Between three years of living in a country at war with plenty of relatives and friends wounded, killed, etc. and three years in the Photodrama GAME and nary a sale, I am a nervous man and find myself restless, irritable and I don't know what." And another, with less nervous and irritable tendencies but just as discouraged, comes a bit nearer to the truth. He writes: "I was told to do my own selling to Producers. Well, I have sent dozens of stories out and have come to the conclusion the Producers don't buy outside stuff despite the wailings of the Gods that be.—They don't have to buy outside. Nearly four long years playing the GAME and I tell you it is a devil of a game. Have invested my all in it and at last I am disheartened."

§ *Few Unsolicited Manuscripts Accepted.*

As a matter of fact, producers will tell you that they do not buy much "outside stuff," that is unsolicited material. The reason, they say, is because it has been found that not one person in a thousand who write for the movies shows in his

work any appreciation of the requirements of the so-called silver screen. As many as two hundred unsolicited manuscripts are received in a day in the offices of large motion picture concerns. Of these manuscripts, it is said, not more than .001 per cent. are worth considering. And of those worthy of consideration only a very few are accepted and paid for.

Because of the tremendous demand for picture stories—and it is generally acknowledged everywhere that there is a greater demand for motion picture stories than for any other form of the literary art—practically every producer has to depend for the most part upon his own staff of scenario writers. At the same time he is constantly on the lookout for good stories, whether they appear in the form of unsolicited manuscripts or are published in magazines or books. Beside the staff of scenario writers most producers employ a number of people who spend their time reading and reporting upon every story that is published in magazines or in book form. When one of these stories is found suitable to the needs of a particular company the scenario editor of that company communicates

with the author of the story and makes him an offer for the picture rights to the story.

§ *Why Many Scenarios Are Rejected.*

Asked why so many of the unsolicited manuscripts are rejected, a scenario editor gave these reasons: (1) the great majority are obviously written by uneducated people who have no knowledge of human nature and who are lacking in ideas and the ability to write clearly; (2) they are submitted in continuity form; and (3) they are good stories but totally unsuited, for one reason or another, to the screen requirements.

It would seem unnecessary to have to explain that ideas and an intimate knowledge of human nature form the basis of every photoplay just as they are the foundation for every short story, novel, and drama. If one will take the trouble to analyze various photoplays he will probably discover that the plays depend upon actions and reactions, causes and effects. One character does something that is resisted by an opposite force. This opposition, or reaction, to the original impulse brings about a complication, or crisis; and this complication is solved by further actions and reactions. Unless an author is sufficiently ac-

quainted with human behavior to know how certain natures react to various forces and incidents the chances are, scenario editors will tell him, his stories and photoplays will bring him a great many more rejection slips than checks.

Photoplay producing has come to be such a complicated and scientific business, only one who is thoroughly familiar with the mechanical details of photographing a moving picture play can write a continuity. The continuity is a complete description of the properties used and of the action in every scene of a photoplay. It contains all the directions necessary for casting, staging, directing, and photographing the scenario. Writing continuities is an art in itself.

There is a story about a young and successful author, a short story writer who wrote with more or less regularity for the popular fiction magazines. He wanted to get his stories into moving pictures. So he took a correspondence school course in photoplay writing. When he had completed the course he wrote a story that was immediately accepted by a magazine. At the same time, with the knowledge acquired from the correspondence school course, he worked out a continuity for his story and submitted it to a number

of photoplay concerns all of whom rejected it. Some months later, after the story had appeared in the magazine, he received an offer for the picture rights to the story. The scenario editor who bought the story had also read the continuity. He sent for the author and told him that had he submitted the original story instead of the continuity it would have been purchased. The continuity, he explained, distorted the plot and gave no idea of the excellence of the story. Incidentally, this author—like so many experienced fiction writers—has never been able to master the art of continuity writing.

§ *Scenarios Should Be in Story Form.*

Most scenario editors agree that the only satisfactory way to submit a scenario is in story form. Some editors even refuse to read a scenario in any other form. An editor said not long ago that an unsolicited continuity had practically no chance of being accepted. This same editor advised submitting a story to the magazines before sending it to a photoplay concern. A published story suitable to the screen is more desired and better paid for than an unpublished story.

There are many reasons why certain deserving

stories are unsuited to the photoplay market. In the first place, between ten and twenty million people are said to attend the movies every day, and not the same ones every day. This gigantic audience is made up of all types and all classes, the rich and poor, the society man and the day-laborer, the educated and the uneducated. Where the so-called legitimate theater makes no attempt to please every taste and all degrees of intelligence—the Columbia Burlesque attracting one type of people, the Hippodrome another, the New Amsterdam Roof a third, and so on—the moving picture theater is open to everybody. "The photoplaywright's first and most difficult problem," said a scenario editor, "is to produce stories that will appeal to everybody without either offending the intelligence of the educated or over-taxing the mental capacity of the uneducated."

§ *Study the Personalities of Stars.*

Then the personalities of the stars must be considered. Many excellent stories are rejected by producers because they cannot be adapted to the peculiar personalities of the stars in their respective companies. Most of the stars in the film

world require plays of a special type. Charles Ray, for example, might make an overwhelming success of a play in which Charles Chaplin would be a miserable failure. John Barrymore does one kind of thing and Douglas Fairbanks specializes in another. Mary Pickford would probably not draw very great crowds to see her in a picture written expressly for Theda Bara. And so it goes. If a company has only a man "lead" it is quite useless to submit to that company a girl heroine story. It is a good plan for the would-be photoplaywright to study the personalities of moving picture stars and to analyze the plays in which they appear. Much can be learned in this way. And, then, the photoplaywright can make a story for a particular star. Stories written especially for some star are, it is said, always in demand—when they are well done.

The cost of productions cannot be overlooked by the young author. Producing even the simplest motion pictures is an expensive business. Costume dramas, spectacles, pictures requiring trick photography, double exposures, et cetera, and "stunt" pictures of the breathless melodrama type are best left to the professional continuity writers and scenario editors. A careful perusal

of the photoplay trade papers will give some idea of the kind of stories the producers are looking for. For instance, here is a notice clipped a short time ago from "The Editor:"

> METRO PICTURE CORPORATION, 1540 Broadway, New York, N. Y., J. E. Brady, editor, says he is interested in modern stories with a good outstanding theme, dramatic or melodramatic, with some heart interest. It does not at present want costume material, or purely war stories, or Western of the cowboy or Indian variety. It likes stories with an American atmosphere.

As the "photoplay stage"—the space in which occurs the main action of a play—comprises a range of fifteen feet the author may not, so to speak, spread his characters all over the lot or write a photoplay that could be produced only on the stage of the New York Hippodrome. Of course there may be occasional scenes here and there, in a ballroom, on the beach, in a city square, or what not, but the vital action of the story must take place within the fifteen foot range.

Another cause for rejecting certain scenarios, editors say, is that they contain so much that cannot be photographed. It is well to remember always that the photoplaywright tells his story solely by means of action. The thoughts of his

characters and their natures are shown in terms of action. The short story writer may represent his characters as carrying on a train of involved thought, but the photoplaywright is limited in this respect and therefore takes care not to make his characters too subtle or complicated for their natures to be revealed through their actions.

The photoplay with an unlimited number of *dramatis personæ* is pretty sure to be returned to its creator. Producers seem to think that the number of chief characters should be kept down to five.

§ *Prices Paid by Producers for Photoplays.*

The general misunderstanding regarding the prices paid by producers for photoplays is widespread. A concern which is backed by a number of the best known moving picture companies wrote in one of its recent advertisements: "The motion picture industry *must* have new scenarios. . . . It is willing to pay fortunes for these stories; it is ready to crown the successful scenario writers with fame and maintain them in luxury." The spirit may be willing but the flesh seems to be pretty weak. However willing the motion picture industry may be to pay for-

tunes for stories and to crown the "successful scenario writers with fame and to maintain them in luxury" the fact remains that the industry rarely pays large sums for stories and that there are a number of successful scenario writers who have not been crowned with fame or even maintained in luxury. Once in a while, and rather a long while at that, $25,000 or $50,000 or maybe a bit more is paid for the picture rights to a story. As a rule the most successful sales are nearer $2,500 or $5,000, and the *average* sales are somewhere around $500. A few, very few, prominent authors, who are featured, have royalty arrangements with producers. It is said on good authority that Lasky paid only $7,500 for the picture rights to "The Sheik," one of the best selling moving pictures of 1922.

The preparation of the photoplay manuscript is not an immensely important matter. Scenario editors do not seem to be so particular about the appearance of a manuscript as are magazine and book editors. Only a short time ago a scenario editor announced that he would read every manuscript submitted to him whether it was typed or handwritten, whether it was on colored paper, legal paper, or wrapping paper. Be that as it

may, a number of editors confessed that the manuscripts that first catch their interest are the manuscripts that are neatly typewritten in double spacing on white paper, about 8½ x 11 inches. The most satisfactory and pleasing arrangement of the reading matter seems to be to devote the first page to the title, the name and address of the author, a classification of the photoplay—Feature comedy-drama suggested for Thomas Meigan, or Two reel comedy, or whatever it is—and the size of the cast. The next pages as a rule give the following data in the order stated: a very brief synopsis, from 250 to 1200 words, sketching the theme of the play; the character cast—a list of the important characters with a description of each; and the scenario or working synopsis of the play—this is generally written in story form and requires as many as six or seven thousand words, sometimes more, to do it justice.

§ *Scenarios Are Expanded Synopses.*

The scenario, editors say, does not have to be a finished short story. It does not go into the details necessary to the short story, nor does it have the literary polish. As a rule it has a certain amount of individuality, and moves logi-

cally, swiftly, and progressively along a single channel. It contains very little dialogue. The first part of the scenario, the introductory paragraphs, is called the Premise. This is followed by the Complication, which is the story proper, dealing with the incidents that lead up to the climax. Finally comes the Solution, which is the dénouement, the conclusion to the story.

Titles are subject to change more or less without notice. But if the photoplaywright is able to head his scenario with a compelling, artful title so much the better. A fresh, suggestive title is pretty sure to arouse the curiosity of an editor and divert his interest to the story under it. Short titles are said to be best. The usual title contains not more than seventeen letters. Why seventeen? Because only a very few of the electric signs used above the entrances to moving picture theaters are large enough to accommodate a title of more than seventeen letters.

When a scenario is accepted it is sent to the studio where the continuity writer prepares the continuity for the director. The scenario editor or the director or sometimes the star may make changes in this continuity. A few directors work directly from the scenarios. It is said that D. W.

Griffith, who staged "The Birth of a Nation," "Orphans of the Storm," and other successes, directs his productions without the aid of a continuity, carrying the details of the story in his mind only and working out the development of each scene as he goes along. Mr. Griffith has a remarkable memory and there are probably few other directors who are capable of successfully directing photoplays in this unusual manner.

After all the scenes have been "shot" or photographed, the films go to the "cutting editor" who assembles the scenes and fastens them together in the desired order. A number of photographs are taken of each scene and it is the duty of the cutting editor, sometimes assisted by the director and others, to select the best of these when assembling the film. When the films have been arranged to the satisfaction of the cutting editor the "title man" writes the necessary titles and has them inserted in the right places.

§ *Protecting the Non-Copyrighted Scenario.*

Moving picture producers have frequently been accused of plagiarising unsolicited manuscripts and published stories. "Beyond question there is chicanery in the motion picture business,"

wrote an authority on the subject several years ago. "On the western coast some little shyster company starts up each week, puts out a flaunting sign, gathers up bushels of scripts, and disappears. Other companies, while advertising that they will pay good prices for stories, have stuff written up in their own studios from ideas gratuitously obtained." There are tricksters in every trade, but there seems to be less chicanery in the photoplay industry today than when the above was written. However, there are ways of protecting scenarios that have not been copyrighted. The Authors' League of America, for instance, conducts a registration bureau for the registration and protection of non-copyrighted scenarios; and scenarios can also be filed with the United States Copyright Department.

Published books and short stories are submitted to motion picture concerns by the publishers, through literary agencies, and by the authors themselves. The best time to submit a story to a photoplay concern is just after it has been accepted by a publisher. In such a case a letter is generally sent with the manuscript stating that the story has been accepted by such and such a publisher and is scheduled for publication on this

or that date. The photoplay producer, if he decides to buy the picture rights to the story, can then arrange to release the picturization within a reasonable time after the publication of the story so that the picture will profit by the publisher's advertising of the published story.

§ *Giving the Author Credit on the Screen.*

When an author sells the picture play rights to a story that has been, or is about to be, published it is customary for the producer to include a clause in the contract providing that the name of the author and the original title of the story shall be shown on the screen with the picturization of the story. A number of photoplay producers do not care to feature the name of a young or not very well known author, with the result that more than one author has seen the photoplay taken from his novel shown on the screen under a new title and under the names of the producer, director, photographer, continuity writer, and title man; the author himself receiving no credit.

An author of a copyrighted work sold to a producer has also the right to demand that the producer mention the author's name and the original title of the story in all bill posters, circulars, and

other publicity matter distributed by the producer to advertise the picturization of the story. It seems only fair that the author of a story from which a motion picture has been made should receive full credit for having created the story.

Sometimes advance proofs of a story scheduled for early publication are sent out to several producers simultaneously. This a perfectly legitimate procedure. But when an author does this he is generally expected to notify all the companies to whom he has sent the proofs when he has accepted an offer for the picture rights to the story.

## XI

### BOOK REVIEWING AND OTHER LITERARY CHORES

A VERY considerable army of people engage in writing as a business who do not write successful fiction, nor successful plays, nor successful scenarios. Many of them are successful enough, in their way, as journalists. These may be editorial writers, or newspaper "correspondents," or writers of special articles for, say, the weekly magazines, or reporters of various sorts and degrees. Others may be press agents of divers kinds, and what not.

Not a few of the younger of these professional writers cheerily regard their occupation as a more or less temporary means of gaining a livelihood, a marking of time, a stop-gap until the happy day to which they aspire when, by efforts outside their routine work, they shall have acquired the opportunity to devote themselves to creative work—and to write what they really "want to." There is, of course, in the annals of literature plenty of precedent for such a spirit.

Some members of this populous company of work-a-day writers have on a time happened, so to say, to ring the bell a little while with work of more popular character, and live in the hope that they may chance do so again—sometime. Such things have been done.

Others have hard bought self wisdom; and have philosophically adapted themselves to the fact (which they have recognized as true) that they have not the flame. Well, there is this to be said: the curse of genius does not smite them still. Men and women frequently have the calmness of spirit to enjoy much more deeply the great works of literature when they have ceased to fret themselves with the fever of yearning to make some. And an intelligent view of the literature of the day may be perceptibly increased when one has adopted the disinterested rôle of, so to say, a non-combatant.

§ *Success Without Applause.*

Then, strange as it may seem to many burning souls, there are many hard writing men who suffer nothing for literary ambition's sake. Excellent writing men among them, too. And men who know much of literature, both transient and

enduring. Writing is their business; they (not a few) take pride in the conscientious character of their workmanship, and enjoy the respect of their colleagues. They are completely devoted to their business and could not countenance the thought of any other. But on their way down to the substantial atmosphere of "the office," or wherever their path of duty leads them for the day, it does not occur to them to astonish the world, nor, indeed, to seek any applause at all. When a friend suggests to one of them that he "ought to" write a book (like such or such a one which has just made such a hit) like as not he brushes the idea aside with amusement as a little joke.

Much persuasion by his publishers has to be brought to bear on one of the most capable editorial writers in the country to induce him from time to time to collect his scattered magazine articles into a volume of "essays." "What's the use?" is his comment. Well, they are quite worth preserving for the delectation of a rather select audience of very fair proportions for that kind of thing. When pressed to write a "real" book—a sustained work of serious purpose, and a thing of which he is eminently capable—this cultivated

gentleman's quiet reply is: No, he is simply a commentator upon the shifting scene—his field is "marginalia." He leads a life of intellectual dignity and is content.

One of the best known of New York's dramatic critics has steadily refused all publishers' solicitations for a book, though now and then (as a sort of lark, apparently) he writes a magazine article (having nothing to do with the theater) of much wit and charm. One of the most widely read of New York newspaper "columnists" recently pooh-poohed the insistent urging of the publishers of former books of his that he put together another volume of his "stuff," declaring that the material was too slight in character to be reprinted in such a form. He is, indeed, a man who knows everybody, goes everywhere, sees everything, reads everything—enjoys both life and literature hugely. And then there is a writer well known for his essays and biographical studies who when urged by a couple of distinguished writing friends of his to write a novel replied: "But aren't there enough unreadable novels being turned out by almost everybody now?"

And the dream of the average newspaperman

in a great city is to some day run a small-town paper of his own.

§ *The Adventure of Making a Living.*

Very little is said about the phase of the writing business which has just been indicated. The point in here glancing at the matter is this: The literary aspirant is apt to have a somewhat warped view of the situation, and to count very much out of its true proportions a very obvious kind of success. There are writers and writers, and there is a good deal in the "literary life" beside the tumult and the shouting. Wasn't it Carolyn Wells who one time remarked that the best of the rewards in her career was her association with the people she met? But the real core of the matter is an indestructible interest in the thing itself—in writing. If you have that you cannot fail, whatever your fortunes in the world; because the fullness of your reward comes from within you, and there none can break in and steal. William Hazlitt had a devil of a time of it in this life, but when he came to die he remarked: "Well, I have had a happy life."

But man cannot live by love for literature alone. There is the problem of making a living,

or rather let us call it the adventure. A thought common among those who hope some day to write books of their own is that they will make a beginning toward that end by reviewing books already written by others. But how to make this beginning?

§ *How Many Newspapers Fill Up Their Book Columns.*

Something which looks like a section of book reviews appears in a great many newspapers. The "literary notices" of the papers in smaller places, however, frequently are nothing more than publicity material sent out by the publishers and "pasted up," as the expression is; that is, what are called the "canned reviews" written in the offices of the publishers are clipped from the "clip sheets" supplied gratuitous to all newspapers, stuck on to pages of copy paper, and, with little or no editing, sent to the compositor. Naturally, this matter is all eulogistic. An interesting story is related by a man who conducts very successfully a syndicate which sells various forms of service to newspapers. He endeavored to interest a number of papers in the idea of subscribing for a weekly "literary letter" to be sup-

plied by a writer on literary subjects of national reputation and an attractive and popular style. The feature would have cost small papers very little each, and its news of authors and survey of current books would, of course, have been impartial. They answered, however, most of them, by saying that they did not see why they should pay anything for such material when they got "the same thing" free from the publishers.

Publishers do not, of course, send review copies of their books to the newspapers in small communities. To do this would mean a greatly excessive distribution of free copies. The newspaper of a small town has neither the space nor the audience to make such a procedure profitable to the publisher. The publicity department of a publishing house chooses pretty carefully the list of newspapers to which review copies of each of its books are to go. Only the papers in the half dozen or so greater cities get nearly everything. Many important or expensive books are sent out for review rather sparingly.

§ *Book Reviewing for Small Town Papers.*

Newspapers in the smaller cities, though they receive a goodly number of review volumes, fre-

quently cannot afford to employ a literary editor; nor would such a person have enough to do where little more than a couple of columns perhaps less often than once a week can be devoted to the subject of books. The city editor, maybe, attends in odd moments to so inconsequential a matter as literature. [Or, in some cases, almost anyone about the place.] He may write all the book notices himself, or his wife may write a few now and then for literary exercise. He does not make much of a practice of giving out books for review on a business basis. In little cities the man in charge of the book notices for a newspaper there may every once in a while give a book to someone locally known for literary interests or attainments for a piece about it. In such cases oftentimes the reviewer gets the book to keep for his work, and nothing more. Indeed, a number of struggling magazines of a literary tendency and read more or less beyond the boundaries of their own locality reward their reviewers with nothing more than the books they review.

It may be remarked by the way that every now and then one comes upon a most excellent book review in a "provincial" newspaper, written, very probably, by one not at all actively engaged in

reviewing, but, obviously, by a genuine student of literature. One is tempted to say that the quality of the reviewing in the metropolitan papers is much better than it used to be. And yet maybe one can be too sure of that. A number of the newspapers of New York and other leading eastern cities a couple of decades or so ago had literary pages of altogether noble character. Perhaps they were a little heavy in effect as such things go to-day. But sprightly literary criticism did not come into American newspapers with the sudden rise of the present younger generation, as numerous members of that company apparently suppose. This fact an examination of the files some ten years back of perhaps the best known newspaper in the United States will very distinctly show.

§ *Specialists and the Signed Review.*

The situation has, however, altered in quite recent years. All in all, considerably more space is given to books in the leading newspapers of the country today than was the case a few years ago. There is a decidedly increased amount of publishers' advertising. More people, in all likelihood, read book reviews now than formerly.

Much greater space than was possible not long ago is now, because of the remarkably increased general interest in such works, given to books of distinctly literary character. The signed review has become much more general. This, doubtless, has made for more responsibility. Where formerly the facile pen of the professional hack reviewer ordinarily sufficed, the tendency now is to obtain the judgment of specialists living everywhere. And the vogue of the columnists (men of letters as well as wits) has done much to stimulate a popular taste for literary journalism.

How does one go about the matter of becoming a book reviewer? As has been shown, to derive any appreciable revenue from such a source it is necessary to deal with the newspapers of a large city and the well-established magazines which devote attention to current literature. A thing frequently done by the novice is to send to a literary editor, without any preliminary negotiation, a review of a book published any time within the preceding two or three months. There is very little or no likelihood of such an article being used. A short story or an article not dealing with a topic of the moment may be good any time; but a book review is a highly perishable

commodity. Literary editors usually make a good deal of a point of promptness in handling their material. And publishers are very keen about early reviews. A common practice with their more important books is for them to send out for review advance copies or "sheets" (unbound volumes), with a word stating the "release date" for the review. Their hope is that the reviews (at least a number of them) will appear in print on or shortly after the date of publication of the book. Quarterly journals, of course, cannot pursue a policy of journalistic timeliness; and they endeavor to compensate for this circumstance by a more pondered quality in their reviews.

§ *Some Ways of Getting Books to Review.*

The distinguished editor of one of the most successful literary sections of a New York newspaper recently was asked if there was anything he would care to say that might be of service to readers of these pages. He made with a good deal of vigor a complaint. It was that so many people come in (and so many write in) to say that they want to do reviewing, but give him no idea of what sort of books they are particularly

concerned with. When a person has such an interview with an editor what is the customary happening? The editor (to politely get rid of him) takes down his name and address, intimating that he may send him some books before a great while—and that is the end of the matter.

The course more likely to lead to some success is this: The caller (or the one who writes the editor a letter) to state at once the field of his special interest, and (this, at least, should do no harm) to ask for certain books which have just been published or are about to be published. Later it is not a bad idea for the applicant to check in the publishers' lists of advance announcements the titles of books which he feels particularly qualified to write about and to send these lists to the editor he has called upon. Not a bad idea, that is, if it is not overdone. Though persons looking for books to review have sometimes in this way pestered literary editors out of all consideration for themselves.

### § *Letters of Recommendation Often "Scraps of Paper."*

The showing of examples of work done elsewhere may be useful. Letters of recommenda-

tion are often valueless. Much depends upon the position of the writer of the letter. Certainly there is no advantage to be gained by presenting a letter by someone "back home" (an instructor in English, perhaps, or a clergyman) that the editor never heard of. The editor, very probably, would not be particularly inclined to give *him* a book to review. And too much reliance is frequently placed upon letters of introduction from men of position in the literary world. Such letters very often are merely perfunctory, and are discounted as such by the editor to whom they are addressed. Though now and then one of them leads to a happy chance. A writer and editor of considerable name and an easy going temper (and one who has contributed more than a little to the substance of these chapters) had given out so many letters of introduction with no result that he had come to expect nothing ever to happen from them. In fact, he fell into the mood of regarding it as something of a little joke on his editor friends whenever he sent around a new chap with a bunch of letters. Then one day a youth came back within a short time from a great newspaper with a number of books. The amiable writer of letters of introduction was somewhat

startled: he wondered whether or not his protegé had a particle of ability. A bona fide friend of influence in editorial circles every now and then does give the newcomer a good deal of help in obtaining books to review, and other literary chores. A very popular reviewer who was a chum of a literary editor one time took away with him a book which he said he wanted for a friend of his to review. His friend was unknown to this literary editor, or to any other; and he had never written a book review in his life. He soon rivaled his patron, the star reviewer on that paper, and not long afterward was invited to become the literary editor of another metropolitan journal. Matters do not, however, happen that way right along. Usually a good deal of leg work is required to become a reviewer—the potential critic must continually make the round of many editorial offices.

§ *Observe Various Editorial Policies.*

In the matter of reviewing, as in the case of any other form of writing, it is a sensible thing to study the character of the journal to which one purposes to contribute. Though, again as in any other form of writing, it is, of course, a very fool-

ish thing to do to attempt slavishly to imitate anything as a model of style. It is merely a fact, obvious enough, that a review which goes very well in one place oftentimes would not fit into the scheme of things of an editor somewhere else. Reviewers for publications of any standing at all are left quite free to express their own opinions. At the same time, anyone may observe, the temper of some journals is one of restraint of style in adverse criticism; books are seldom hit very hard. In other journals there is a tendency toward more directness of manner. And just now a spirit of rather ebullient and caustic criticism is having something of a vogue here and there.

Reviewers are free to express their own opinions. Such things have happened as this: Not long ago a man who had been contributing feature articles to one of the foremost of New York newspapers more or less regularly for about ten years got out a book. The book was made up very largely of articles which had appeared in this paper. The author's work was much esteemed by the editor of the paper, by the literary editor and by the paper's columnist, all personal friends of his. The book was given out for review to a well-known critic who had heretofore

reviewed favorably this author's books. He took a dislike to this one, and wrote of it in rather a contemptuous manner. The review was promptly published. Once in a great while a literary editor questions the soundness of judgment expressed in a review, or suspects that its hostility toward the book may have been actuated by malice, and holds it up for personal investigation, or maybe "kills" it. Reviewers occasionally complain that the point has been left out of their review when it appears in print. And it is quite true that a reviewer's balanced judgment of a book sometimes is upset when his editor "cuts" the article to fit space. The personal equation, of course, enters into reviewing as into pretty much everything else; and a literary editor or a reviewer who is the friend of an author is likely to be, with no dishonesty of mind, friendly to his book. And sometimes, it may be discerned, a literary editor or a reviewer who has taken an aversion to an author is, with a little less honesty of mind, impelled to a scornful treatment of his book.

It is frequently said in a waggish way that reviewers never read the books they review. Well, a man long familiar with horses does not have to

spend a day with a horse to note its points. In the case of many books the experienced reviewer would not in all probability write a better review if he read the book twice through than the one he writes after a skillful reading around in it. Still, it is highly advisable for the inexpert reviewer to acquaint himself pretty well with the book before him. Some very ludicrous blunders have resulted, even with experienced reviewers, from too much reliance upon intuition as to what the book was about. Sometime ago a hurried reviewer of a novel by a well-known woman literary editor married (in his review) a fourteen year child in the story to her grandfather. He (this reviewer) did not live happily immediately afterward.

§ *Perhaps the Poorest Paid Work in the World.*

Reviewing in general is, perhaps, the poorest paid work in the world. Certainly it would seem to be when you consider the effort and required equipment involved. The reviewer whose name is not sought by literary editors must trot around town on his quest for books. Weeks, or months maybe, after he has called upon an editor he receives a book or two from him—perhaps.

He devotes more or less time to reading the book. Perhaps he feels it advisable to refresh his memory of other books by this author. Maybe a number of matters seem to require to be looked up and verified. Then there is the work of writing his article. It is necessary for him to bother with taking it, or sending it, to the editor.

Payment for book reviews, to the outside reviewer, is practically always on publication. An editor may urge a reviewer to much haste and then find himself, for one reason or another, unable to fit in the review for some time. A check arrives usually about a week after the review appears. Payment from newspapers ranges from about six dollars to from eight to twelve dollars a column; approximately a thousand words to a column. Some newspapers deduct space allotted to "heads" and quotations from the book. Literary magazines do pretty well when paying a cent and a half a word.

Signed reviews, of course, bring in indirect reward in making their author better known. Persons of illustrious name sometimes are paid considerable sums for reviews. The highest paid book reviewer on record was ex-President Roosevelt. He asked nothing. But on one occa-

sion, at least, in payment for one review he was sent a check by a New York newspaper for an amount greater than many a good author receives as the entire profit from a book. Well known writers not infrequently are paid decidedly in excess of space rates for book reviews. And, on the other hand, every once in a while such writers as Rupert Hughes and Irvin Cobb, or such personages as David Jayne Hill, amiably accept a check for something like fourteen dollars and forty-nine cents for a carefully written book review. A reviewer having a "desk job," and that would likely be a literary editor or assistant literary editor, has a fair salary, as things go in the literary world.

§ *Field of the "Feature Story."*

The magazine sections of city newspapers and the illustrated weekly magazines of national circulation furnish a field for a form of journalism known as the "feature story." In the chapter of this book on "Approaching the Modern Editor" much that was said would apply to the subject of marketing such articles. In many cases the magazine sections of the newspapers in the smaller cities are made up largely of syndicated

material which has been placed in New York, is subscribed for by papers in a number of cities and published by them simultaneously. And so these papers buy a very limited amount of features of their own. The type of thing which is most likely to appeal to them from the writer near at hand is something which they cannot get from the distant syndicates, that is articles of local color. A writer who can discover or assemble interesting and little known historical data concerning, say, the site of a prominent building in course of construction very probably has an acceptable "story." His material, by the way, may come out of the past, but it is news to the community.

A prime point always to be borne in mind by one who proposes to write feature articles is that he is expected to deal with *news*. Many people seeking this form of work, like many trying to get books to review, simply go in and tell an editor that they would like to write "something" for him. That very, very seldom gets one anywhere. What he wants to hear is exactly the points of the article that you have in mind to write. It is a usual thing for an experienced feature writer to sell his article before it is writ-

ten, to obtain a definite order for it. Though a writer whose qualities and abilities were unknown to the editor doubtless could obtain no more than a tentative agreement. That, however, is (so to say) getting one's head inside the tent.

§ *Writing the Feature Story.*

How does the productive writer of feature articles manage to keep himself continually supplied with timely subjects? Well, for one thing, he is likely to keep a searching eye on the daily papers. Many little news items contain excellent hints for elaborated articles. Not long ago there was a bit of discussion in the New York papers as to whether or not "block parties" were immoral. A good many people, doubtless, had never seen a block party. A very picturesque article, indeed, could have been written picturing the scene at several of them. An excellent story was printed in the magazine section of a New York paper recently describing the summertime lure of several restaurants just off Longacre Square as strikingly changed from their wintertime appeal. And there are seasonable subjects for feature articles which continue to be good year after year. For instance, no

wide-awake newspaper would fail to hail again with another story the coming to town of The Circus.

The feature writer must work quickly. His job is not to polish, but to get it done, and get it in. Dispatch must be his watchword. An increasing number of women are successfully engaged in the work. With energy, intelligence, courage and industry a comfortable, modest living may be made in this field. Perhaps to the qualities mentioned should be added salesmanship—the ability to talk convincingly to an editor about the articles one wants to do.

§ *Copy Writing and the Advertising Business.*

The author of several pretty popular books, who had formerly edited with very fair success a widely known magazine of literary tendency, found himself not long ago without remunerative employment. H. L. Mencken asked him why he did not look into advertising. Julian Street, a number of years ago, before he was at all known as a magazine writer and an author of books, was an advertising man; in fact, was a partner in founding the prominent firm of Street and Finney, and himself wrote a quantity of very

clever advertising copy. His copy was, perhaps, in advance of the advertising ideas in general of that day. Lately advertising copy has very widely taken on a decidedly "literary" flavor; so much so, indeed, as sometimes to be rather funny.

At any rate, advertising has come to engage much more than formerly real artistic talent. Charles Hanson Towne recently dipped into advertising for a bit. Gerald Stanley Lee has executed a number of advertising commissions. A light essayist probably known to the readers of these pages recently wrote a booklet for a firm of funeral directors. And so on. Also, illustrations used in advertisements now not infrequently are admirable art, and the work of highly distinguished men. To mention just one instance, the drawings of Wallace Morgan (who is something close to a great artist) for a clothing establishment have stimulated a host of other advertisers to the ambition of obtaining something like them.

Among advertising copy writers, specialists famous in their field make handsome incomes. One of the best known and highest paid of these men remarked the other day that he counted it a

mission of his to impress upon business men "the money value of the written word." Which implies that the fees asked for his services are calculated to command respect among men who are in the habit of measuring the worth of all things in terms of money. The foregoing statements are by no means intended to suggest that it is easy for anyone to get rich quickly by writing advertising copy. Until one has become a recognized leader in the field of advertising commissions are very difficult to obtain on one's own. Nearly all advertising is arranged for by the advertisers through advertising agencies. And the only course usually open for the beginner is for him to gain a small position as copy writer with an advertising agency.

§ *Work of the Publicity Man.*

Almost everything now has a publicity man. Some are highly paid. The least remunerative publicity work probably is that done for publishing houses, though to some temperaments doubtless it is the most interesting. A large amount of publicity work that is done, and paid for, is worthless; it does not get across; editors throw it away instead of using it. And the reason is that

the writer misconceives the nature of successful publicity. Simply to eulogize a thing does not make publicity for it. The skillful publicity story is a story of human interest which does not conspicuously contain any element of advertising, but which has somewhere woven into it (so that it would be difficult to eliminate it) some reference to the subject to which the writer wants to call attention. A model publicity story was an article which the press agent of an actress wrote for a woman's magazine in which he discussed a novel way of caring for the hair and mentioned (well in the body of the story) that this was the method which kept so beautiful the hair of this actress.

§ *Trade Journals and House Organs.*

The enormous number of trade journals and house organs in the United States present a field for making a living at writing and editing largely overlooked. Sometimes positions on these publications require technical knowledge; oftentimes they do not. A young man one time applied for a job as reporter for a musical journal. He told the man who received him that he was industrious, sober, honest and conscientious in his work.

The man in charge did not seem to pay much attention to any of this. At length the young man diffidently confessed that the trouble was that he didn't know anything about music. "Good!" exclaimed the boss; "that 's what we want, a reporter; not someone who's going to turn in an æsthetic of music." Trade journals with positions open frequently advertise in the want columns of the newspapers.

Writing the "autobiography" of a personage celebrated in a field other than literature is a literary chore which now and then turns up for some writer of businesslike conscience but rather down on his luck. Translating for publishing houses, reading manuscripts for them, and editing with more or less rewriting slovenly written volumes that have been accepted are little things that help along when one needs them, and can get them to do.

§ *Using the Publishing House as a Stepping Stone to Success.*

The idea of obtaining a position in a publishing house is strong in the minds of many who aspire to write. There are various ways of looking at that. Persons certainly have gone from

publishing houses to success in creative literature. On the other hand, there are several men in good positions in publishing houses in New York who declare that the atmosphere of their business dulls the whole thing for the spirit with a passion for writing, and who advise all persons who want to write book jacket and catalog copy as a step toward becoming authors to seek a livelihood anywhere but in a publisher's office. Similarly, a daily newspaper grind wears down some and happily brings out others.

"Art," declared Whistler, "happens—no hovel is safe from it, no Prince may depend upon it, the vastest intelligence cannot bring it about, and puny efforts to make it universal end in quaint comedy, and coarse farce."

# XII

## LIMITATIONS OF THE SYNDICATE FIELD

IT has been shown in previous chapters of this book that an author owns a number of "rights" to his work, which, if protected, may be sold to several different concerns for one purpose and another. We have seen, for example, that the first serial rights to a story may be sold to a magazine publisher, the book rights to a book publisher, the picture rights to a photoplay concern, and the dramatic rights to a play producer. An attempt has been made to give the writer a fair idea of the values of these rights and of how the rights may be disposed of to the best advantage of the author. Not so very long ago publishers rarely accepted an author's work unless they obtained control of all the rights to the work. It was customary then for the publishers to profit, at the author's expense, by the subsequent sales of the various available rights to the work. There were cases where a publisher sold

the picture rights—and other rights—to a novel bought according to this scheme of things and kept the entire proceeds from the sale. However, even in those days, there were publishers who divided the receipts from such sales with their authors whether or not they were legally bound to do so.

Besides the rights already discussed there are to be considered the second and third serial rights, sometimes called the syndicate rights because they are generally sold to syndicates. Syndicates are organizations that supply a large number of newspapers and magazines with all kinds of material for publication. Very often this material is sent to the periodicals for simultaneous publication. Fontaine Fox's cartoons and the like are furnished by syndicates.

§ *Work of Special Syndicates.*

Some syndicates are formed for the purpose of handling a single feature only. Suppose a sensational book dealing with a widely discussed and timely subject to be written by an internationally famous authority on the subject. A syndicate might then be organized especially to dispose of the serial rights to this work to newspapers and

magazines. The book would then be divided into "instalments" in advance of the book's publication and a large number of copies of each instalment would be printed. A representative of the temporary syndicate would then probably visit the managing editors of the most prominent newspapers in each large city of the country and offer the instalments for publication in these newspapers on certain stated dates for such and such a price—the price varying according to the size of the newspaper's circulation. Shortly before the last instalment is due to appear in the newspapers the book itself would be published. And immediately after the publication of the book the syndicate's representative would probably make another tour of the country, offering the original newspaper instalments to the editors of country and small town papers for publication. When this work is completed the syndicate would dissolve itself.

These temporary syndicates are the exception rather than the rule. The greatest number of sales of second and third serial rights to stories, articles and features are negotiated by more or less permanent syndicates that are conducted by newspapers, such as the Philadelphia Public

Ledger Syndicate, by publishers, such as the Century Syndicate, and by individual concerns, such as the Wheeler Syndicate and the McNaught Syndicate.

Syndicates, it will be found, conduct their business with less noise and public attention than any other publishing concern. For this reason, it seems, the majority of writers know very little about the methods and requirements of this industry. Authors and would-be authors appreciating the financial possibilities of the syndicate field are constantly asking, "How should I go about having a short story syndicated?" And "Can you tell me how I should proceed to market syndicate material for newspapers?"

The outstanding difference between the methods of syndicates and those of publishers, theatrical managers, and, to some extent, photoplay producers is that the latter depend upon contributions and unsolicited manuscripts whereas the syndicate is, as a general rule, self-supporting.

§ *Methods of Syndicates.*

Practically all of the established syndicates either employ a highly trained staff of feature

writers and illustrators who are familiar with the peculiar needs of the syndicate market, or else depend entirely upon the work of such internationally known writers and illustrators as G. K. Chesterton, Stephen Leacock, Fontaine Fox, Briggs, etc. These syndicates rarely, if ever, consider unsolicited manuscripts.

With a few exceptions the syndicate department of a metropolitan newspaper or publishing house handles only the second serial rights to the material that has been bought for the use of that particular newspaper or publishing house. In the case of the newspapers, this material is generally prepared by their own editors, reporters, feature writers, and correspondents, although unsolicited manuscripts are sometimes accepted. Most of these manuscripts are bought outright at the regular newspaper space rates and then resold through the syndicate department of the paper, the author receiving nothing when the material is resold.

§ *Managing Your Own Syndicate.*

Some writers have syndicated their own stuff. This is usually done by making a special arrangement with a local newspaper whereby the

paper is given permission to publish the articles in return for seventy-five or more advance galley proofs of the articles. These galley proofs are sent by the writer to the feature editors of seventy-five or more newspapers scattered throughout the country, with a letter stating that they may use the articles on certain specified dates for four or five dollars, or whatever amount the author desires to charge—newspapers having large circulations being charged more than the papers with small circulations. Writers who have tried this have said that the results of their efforts have not been altogether satisfactory, as the small amount received from the newspapers scarcely repays them for the cost of sending out the proofs with letters, the difficulty of collecting from the papers that agree to use the material, and the time spent on preparing the articles and conducting the necessary correspondence.

Like photoplays syndicated stories, features, and so on, have an exceedingly large audience. The writer of syndicate material, like the photoplaywright, has to solve the problem of producing material that will interest and entertain everybody in this mixed crowd, which often numbers more than several million people of all ages

and of all degrees of intelligence. The ideal syndicate feature, editors will tell you, should be original, entertaining, novel, easily understood, and of universal interest. Most editors insist that the feature should consist of a series of six or a dozen—sometimes more—*brief* articles. Single articles are rarely accepted by syndicates.

§ *Marketing Syndicate Material.*

The usual procedure for marketing syndicate material is first to prepare four or five articles of a proposed series, and then send them around with an explanation of the basic idea and scope of the series. The first thing that will be considered by the syndicate editor is the originality of the idea. If in the letter of explanation the writer states, as so many do state, that his proposed series is "after the same idea as the Walt Mason (or the Frank Crane, or the F. P. A., or the anyone else) syndicated matter and other similar items" his idea will probably be rejected without further consideration. On the other hand, if he shows that his work is quite different from the features turned out by Walt Mason and all the others the syndicate editor will undoubtedly give his sample manuscripts careful

attention to determine whether or not what the writer says about them is true. The editor will then consider the interest of the subject and the manner in which it has been presented. Finally, he will decide whether or not it is the sort of thing he can use profitably. If he decides to accept it he may offer a definite sum for all serial rights to the entire series, or he may agree to pay a certain percentage of the total receipts from that particular series, according to the merits of the material and the reputation of the writer.

## XIII

### THE NEW BOOKSHOPS

ONE bright Saturday something like ten years ago, in the days when I was a clerk in a book store, I remember that I happened to ask a fellow clerk how he was going to spend Sunday. His reply was: "Dreading Monday."

I do not cite this joyless young man's attitude toward his occupation as representative of the spirit of all booksellers of that time. But I do recall that in the relation of his heart toward his work he was far from being unique among people in the business of selling books in those days. Indeed, I suppose it is possible that now there are people around here and there selling books who much prefer Sundays and holidays to any other days. But it is nothing short of a remarkable phenomenon, the number of people quite recently got into the book business in the United States who strike you very much as being reluctant to drop bookselling for any length of time for anything else at all.

The other day I ran into a man who a short time ago had opened a bookshop in Buffalo. He was searching for any new books of verse that he might not have known about. He explained that it was the custom in his shop for the staff to gather a little before the hour of opening and have a poetry reading. I had to laugh. That certainly would have been regarded as a funny layout in my day as a bookseller, and the staff doubtless would have demanded time and a half for overtime.

I knew many able and thoroughly industrious booksellers in my day. But I never could understand why the major number of them had ever gone into the book business. They would have been just as able and industrious in some other business. Some of them, I felt sure, would have made excellent waiters. Others inclined me to believe that they could have filled capably and gracefully very decent positions in a bank. And surely the worldly rewards of waiters and bankers were greater than those of booksellers!

§ *The Old Order of Booksellers.*

I could not perceive in many of the booksellers of that time any particular instinct for

reading. They read a little, yes, those confrères of mine (some of them); but not much more, I should say, than other people generally. And mostly what they read was nothing distinguished. They saw, it was fairly plain, no especial connection between the business of selling books and the enjoyment of reading them. And in the cases of most of them, I clearly felt, it did not particularly concern them what kind of book it was that they sold. Though, of course, it was rather gratifying to sell a somewhat expensive one.

Not a few had passed their lives in the book business, and had a remarkable, sometimes an amazing, working knowledge of books. If, for instance, you asked one of them if he had ever heard of such-and-such a book, his answer would be something like this: "Harper and Brothers, 1892, twelve mo., dollar and a half." They had heads like the "Cumulative Index," those veterans. They lived laborious days and conceived of sport as something altogether outside of business. I liked the booksellers of this old hardshell type and esteemed them; and, if I may say so, they seemed (those of them that I knew) not to dislike me, as frequently one or another

of them would advise me to get out of the book business. He felt, I gathered, that I was a little over-literary ever to get on there.

Certain romantic figures there were, too; enthusiasts, young men who would have been miserable (and probably very ineffectual) in any atmosphere not of books, who had something of the joy of the creative artist in his work of furthering the fortunes of good literature, and who suffered very real discomfort of mind when (which was more than a little of the time) the exigencies of their business compelled them to traffic in books which to them were worse than valueless. Booksellers of this type, however, in my day were regarded by the trade generally, I fear, as being rather eccentric, fanatical, perhaps a bit defective in mind, and not exactly "practical" salesmen. And maybe at that time they weren't.

Perhaps my sense of the contrast between then and now has inclined me to lopside somewhat the picture of bookselling some years ago. I call to mind a number of very fine figures still going strong in various cities who were with gladness selling books years before I knew what "O. P." meant. Still, in a number of its aspects,

there has certainly been a metamorphosis in the book business. And this most interesting thing curiously enough has not, so far as I know, before been the subject of any general survey.

One of the arguments advanced against Prohibition, I remember, was that it would shoot a city full of empty corners. I know of only one bookshop that actually was formerly a saloon, or occupies space which used to be part of a saloon. That is the shop in Greenwich Village established in what was the "back room" of the place where one time John Masefield tended bar. There where of old the Demon Rum prevailed, now presides a fiery-haired young man who has become widely known as the "demon bookseller."

§ *Increase in Number of Bookshops.*

A short time ago a writer in the Chicago "Evening Post" observed that in a book entitled (if he remembered aright) "In the Days of the Comet," Mr. Wells caused the character of the earth's people to be changed by contact with a hitherto unknown gas which streamed from a comet and charged the earth's atmosphere; and he remarked that something of the sort must have hit Chicago, as within the last few years the

character of the town had changed in one very important respect—the public was supporting six book stores there today for every one that it allowed to exist a little while ago. That highly commendable gas clearly is not confined to the atmosphere around the nose of Lake Michigan. The September, 1921, number of "The Publishers' Weekly" printed an article entitled "A Notable Increase in Book Dealers." As statistical evidence of what had happened within the last year, a list of new bookshops was appended to the article. Twenty-nine in number they were. The places: New York; Chicago; Philadelphia; Washington, D. C.; Buffalo; Cincinnati; Shelby, North Carolina; San Diego; Bay Shore, New York; New Milford, Connecticut; St. Louis; Miami, Florida; Atlantic City; Allentown, Pennsylvania; New Orleans; Denver; and Paterson. And a "book caravan" had toured districts remote from towns. Several travelling book stores have set up since then, in widely separated parts of the country.

When I began to think of writing this article I made a round of all the newer bookshops in New York on record in the offices of two leading publishing houses. A few weeks later I was

passing through the neighborhood of West Forty-seventh Street and I discovered three new bookshops that I had never seen nor heard of before. I went into them one after another and learned that each one of them had practically just opened.

§ *The New Order of Booksellers.*

In one of these shops I found the proprietor to be a gentleman who until quite recently had been an instructor in English at Harvard, and whose duties there, it appeared, had included collecting books for the university library. While he was specializing in his shop in eighteenth century literature, his stock also included "the best" books of the day. It was his idea that a bookseller had "a function to perform." He was called, as you might say, to aid books that "hadn't had a square deal." An idealist and an amateur, this? One of the other of these shops was a charming place run by a club of New York young women for the semi-centennial fund of an eastern women's college. All help in the shop was voluntary. There was a spirit about of gleefulness and success. I was on my way to visit one of the earliest established and most elab-

orately equipped of the newer order of small bookshops. The business was begun at New Haven six years ago by a gentleman who was formerly director of the Yale University Press. In the extent of its ambition and the literary character of its stock this shop was an innovation in a college town. I recently read an article by an instructor of youth on the subject of "What Do Boys Know?" It was his conclusion that boys of today have a remarkable knowledge of automobiles, and of little else. It was interesting for me to hear that I'd "be surprised" to know to what extent college boys at New Haven had begun to collect first editions, and how they made of the bookshop there something of a club. The handsome New York quarters of this business begun at New Haven were opened about a year and a half ago, and more recently a branch shop has been established at Princeton. One of the pet subjects of the shop in New York is Dr. Johnson. And one of the principles of the shop is to "push people relatively unknown." Edwin Arlington Robinson, for instance, is a hobby there.

About ten years ago there were three kinds of book stores in this country. The large, hand-

somely appointed, exhaustively stocked bookstores in the centre of the city. And in this division I would include the admirable and elaborate book departments of big department stores. Then there were the dealers handling exclusively rare books, choice items, fine bindings, first editions, association volumes, and such things. The Tiffanys of the book trade, they. But they could cater only to book buyers of considerable means. Then, the second-hand book stores. Their windows were amusing: paper covered joke books, dream books, and volumes on phrenology and how to tell fortunes with cards—these, amid a queer medley of worn tomes, were displayed there. Yes; there were, of course, too, some few bookshops confined to their special subjects: architecture, books in the French language, books of Jewish interest, and so on. The book stores of all these various kinds continue to go on very much as before. Except that (and wondrous thing!) you are likely to see a soiled copy of "The Bookman" or "The London Mercury" where you used to see a dream book. But the bright little specialty bookshop which now has come into so great a vogue hardly existed.

A chatty newspaper story has appeared now

and then about one or another of the picturesque little shops recently opened up. And some of the ideas and practical problems of the "small book store" have been discussed a bit in the booksellers' trade journals. But one or another of these shops cannot now be viewed as an isolated matter. In their multitude and in the unity of their purpose they have assumed the proportions of a movement, comparable in significance, one might perhaps say, to the Little Theatre movement.*

§ *The First Little Bookshop.*

The first, as well as I can discover, of these little shops to be dependent upon books alone, was one across the street from the Little Church Around the Corner. It opened in 1909. In its ideals it was identical with the great number of shops of its kind today. In 1916 it failed. But a couple of years ago it arose again, farther uptown, and now it is flourishing like the green bay tree. Or, at least, the young man who had the earlier shop and who manages the new one,

* Note—Since the preparation of this chapter an excellent article on "Bookselling as a Profession for Women," by Madge Jenison, appeared in the "Woman's Home Companion" and later as a monograph published by The Woman's National Book Association.

is the same. The second venture of this description, according to my information, was in the neighborhood of Washington Square, opened in 1911. Through various vicissitudes it has continued on to present prosperity.

The little bookshop early took a hold on Greenwich Village, when the great buzz of bizarre business activity there began. As in the innumerable tea rooms that sprouted up, the bookshop scheme of decoration was sometimes of delirious post-futurist design. And the displays were of "The Liberator," "The Birth Control Review," and everything going on psycho-this and psycho-that. Also a magazine for "endæmonists." They? Why, neo-Epicureans, ultra-Hedonists, and beings of that sort. But the Village has lately changed more than many people know. A Greenwich Village little bookshop today has very much the same stock as a little bookshop anywhere else. One of the bookshops on the Village's Main Street features children's books. And if you want to get anything but a first-rate book there now I think you'll have to go outside of Greenwich Village to find it—or at least to get it openly. In one of the most successful shops there it suddenly

occurred to me not long ago that there was nothing but the most first-rate sort of books in sight. From curiosity I asked the bookseller if he had a copy of a book, an innocent enough volume, but of rather namby-pamby character—quite the kind of thing which not long ago was stigmatized by the epithet "best seller." The bookseller presented somewhat the effect of first glancing cautiously up and down the street. Then he produced the book from beneath a counter and handed it to me with a manner which seemed to say: "Slip it under your coat quick." I might (such appeared to be the atmosphere of the transaction) have been buying some hootch.

§ *Bookselling a Happy Vocation for Women.*

A good many of our modern little bookshops are run by women. I have been told that considerable impetus was given to the movement of women into the book business by Earl Barnes, who in an article about four years ago advocated bookselling as the ideal profession for women. The first independent women's bookshop was established in New York in 1916. At the outset the venture yielded only fifteen dollars a week for the two organizers. Help was given by

volunteers. This shop has expanded far beyond all initial expectation, and has recently moved into decidedly commodious quarters in the Yale Club building. Nine young women now assist in the service and several of these continue to be content to work without salary. The shop has affiliations with seven or eight other shops throughout the country, one in New Orleans, another in Minneapolis. It provides these shops distant from book centres with late importations on consignment. It cultivates the idea of public work equally with the literary side of the business. Served various war boards with government pamphlets and other material during the war. Seeks to induce various publications to work on a plan to treat books as public necessity. It likes the chances to be of service to students in special subjects, undertakes to arrange lectures, and exhibitions of prints, textiles, bindings, bookplates, and specimens of modern printing, for clubs and churches. It now and then arranges for the decoration of a tea room. And is active in three other functions of the modern little bookshop.

Now the National Association of Book Publishers, I understand, has a very sympathetic eye

upon the Small Bookshop, which should offer so happy a field of activity to the young woman returned home from college. Believing that the college girl, after she leaves college, desires decidedly to keep her independence and particularly to enter some industrial line in which she can utilize her education, the Association is going to the Deans of all colleges and through their college papers to the college girls themselves with the story of what young women are now doing in bookselling. Later the plan is to arrange for lecturers to go to the bigger colleges in both the east and the west to talk to the girls directly; and to all those who are seriously interested the National Association will furnish full information and in every way possible seek to make their beginning point in the right direction.

§ *Social Activities in Little Bookshops.*

Though our little bookshop is new with us, it is not new on the other side of the Atlantic. Some time before the war I remember climbing the murky stairs of the tiny Poetry Bookshop somewhere behind Museum Street in London to listen to an afternoon poetry reading. Readings, talks by authors, and literary entertainments

have recently become a regular part of the book business, and particularly of the little bookshop business, from New York to San Francisco. And very stimulating to the business, I understand, these things have been found to be. Now and then a little bookshop publishes a volume or two in a pleasantly uncommercial way. And various little bookshops have come to be headquarters for, or at least regular ports of call of, divers authors. One knows where it is likely that he may find William McFee when he comes off the sea, and where Alfred Kreymborg when he is in New York. The social life of the neighborhood sort of bookshop is, indeed, becoming a good deal of a thing. I heard the other day of a little bookshop which is contemplating serving tea and coffee in the afternoon. Open in the evenings, some of them, they gather in their habitués in as friendly a way as small town cigar stores.

When you go about and look into the matter you discover that the great majority of little bookshops have set up within the last two or three years. It is interesting to learn what the people who run them did before. In Buffalo a wealthy man in the oil business recently retired

after twenty-five years to open a little bookshop, where he has an "old cronies' room," cultivates browsing and contact with customers. A young woman who has the most glorious bob in Greenwich Village, and became the proprietor of a little bookshop, formerly taught "æsthetic physical culture," and later wandered about the Village selling her own cigarettes. When I set out to look into little bookshops I went into two, one after another, and found in each a young woman who but a short time before had been a writer on the staff of the New York "Evening Post." One of these shops I was told was owned by a group of "younger married women of New York" of money and position. I know a young woman in Chicago, a very active literary critic for a great newspaper there, who also runs a little bookshop. And one of the most interesting small bookshops in New York is run by a man who has done a picturesque varity of things: run a farm, worked for missionary societies, written books for other people.

§ *Functions of the Specialty Bookshops.*

The little bookshop is, of necessity for one thing, a specialty shop. The specialty some-

times is the result merely of a very distinctive taste in literature. The other day in a shop much inclined to contemporary English novelists, poets, and essayists, I was told by the young woman there that the stock was limited to her husband's prejudices. His prejudices have brought him a substantial following. A unique enterprise even for New York City is the drama bookshop, devoted exclusively to the sale of plays and books on the theatre and the drama, and an institution which engages largely in the giving of all sorts of information pertaining to its subject. A peculiarly engaging feature of the shop is the shelf of children's plays. A recent addition to highly specialized bookshops in New York is one devoted entirely to orientalia, where some of the greatest scholars in the world call in, sometimes to meet each other for the first time, and add to the membership of what the proprietor calls their "little club." This, he rejoices to think, "lifts the place above a commercial atmosphere altogether."

§ *Bookshops for Children.*

A juvenile bookshop is not a twentieth century project. "Juvenile Library" appeared on the

sign of a London bookseller whose business career began in 1740. By 1800 there were at least three other "juvenile libraries" in London. Charles and Mary Lamb wrote their "Tales from Shakespeare" and "Poetry for Children" for a "Juvenile and School Library" kept by the wife of William Godwin, best known as the father of Mary Shelley. In Philadelphia there were several juvenile book stores very early in the nineteenth century. But the new idea in children's bookshops is the effort to reach the children directly. The first of the modern children's bookshops was opened in Boston in 1915. The stock ranged from toy books to standard editions for young men and women. As in other little bookshops, a special information service was extended. Within the last couple of years children's bookshops, with their amusing dwarf chairs and tables have been opened in New York, Chicago, and Seattle. And not long ago the publisher of a well-known children's magazine opened in New York a "Book House" for children, where you may get the latest toy book or a de luxe "Arabian Nights."

§ *A Master of His Profession.*

People who run specialty bookshops tell you a number of interesting things. The owner of a little bookshop, for one thing, usually wants his shop to stay a small bookshop. He wins his customers' confidence; they put themselves into his hands, and are grateful to him. He does not have to crawl; he is the master of his profession; those who enter "can be nasty somewhere else." There is very little risk in the specialty bookshop, it seems, of losing money; absolutely free credit usually is given; and everybody pays up. The little bookshops co-operate with one another: getting books from each other; sending customers to each other. And, finally, there seems to be something like a conspiracy among them against, as one of them put it, "best sellers in a bad sense." "But," I asked, "if someone wanted a copy of a sensational best seller wouldn't you get it for him?"

"Well," the young woman replied, "we might get it for him, but we'd inquire into his motives."

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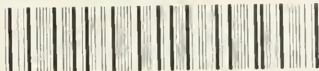
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